

From *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*:

John of Ephesus and the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*,

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PREFACE

The Mediterranean world of late antiquity has in recent years gained popularity with scholars and the lay public both. A lacuna has been present in our studies thus far, however, in the case of a major and compelling writer from this era, John of Ephesus. Living in the sixth century, John led a varied career as a Monophysite monk, missionary, writer, and church leader. Two significant works by John remain extant: his *Ecclesiastical History* and his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. John wrote in Syriac and his focus is often the eastern Byzantine provinces, especially his homeland Mesopotamia. But John's career took him throughout the empire of his day, and he knew the imperial court of Constantinople as intimately as he knew the villages of Amida's regions. John's writings are important in part because they concern a personal encounter with the full Byzantine world of his time, and in part because few writers from late antiquity have opened that world so vividly as he.

John lived through the period spanning the Monophysite movement's greatest successes and defeats. In his youth the Monophysites represented a formidable source of energy and creativity in the Byzantine realm; in his old age, John saw them not simply defeated but stalemated: discredited by the Chalcedonians on the Byzantine throne and incapacitated by their own internal bickerings. Within and beyond this frame of activity were the people of John's world. For John's home, the eastern provinces of Byzantium, the sixth century was above all a time of suffering. Their lands provided the battleground for war between Byzantium and Persia. Their monasteries and church communities, Monophy-

site in faith, endured persecutions by the Chalcedonian government. Famine and plague were chronically ubiquitous. It was a century when tragedy both accountable and capricious was the fabric of daily life.

John has received uneven treatment by modern scholars. Appreciation for his significance was first shown in the pamphlet by J. P. N. Land, *Joannes Bischof von Ephesos der erste syrische Kirchenhistoriker* (Leiden, 1856). Subsequent studies culminated in the monumental work of A. Djakonov, *Ioann Efesskiy* (Petrograd, 1908)—still the only monograph devoted to John. Further efforts followed, primarily textual, and critical editions of John's writings were published in the 1920s and 1930s, accompanied by translations into English for the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* and into Latin for the *Ecclesiastical History*. Nonetheless, John's works continued to be utilized mainly by Syriac scholars, while historians of the late Roman and early Byzantine periods persisted in sidestepping his contribution.

In recent decades, however, scholars of late antiquity have turned to a more comprehensive treatment of the materials available to us, and a greater appreciation for Syriac sources has been apparent. An upsurge in the interest shown for John of Ephesus' *Ecclesiastical History* has accompanied this wider view, and not least because John's records contrast with the contemporary accounts of the Greek literati.

For the most part, John's *Lives of the Eastern Saints* have not shared the limelight. The *Lives* have been used primarily for the information they contain about certain key figures and events in the ecclesiastical crises of the sixth century. Such selective treatment bypasses both what John's *Lives* are about and what they have to offer—as may be seen in two notable exceptions to this situation, Peter Brown's "Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways" and Evelyn Patlagean's *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance 4e–7e siècle*.

This study is an attempt to bring John's *Lives of the Eastern Saints* into view. They provide a different perspective from that of his *History*. Rather than a chronological record of important events, one finds here what is often lacking in such records: the daily world of ordinary people, and how they coped with war, plague, famine, and persecution. Here one sees, above all, Syrian asceticism fully developed. Its practitioners are at home in the small world of the villager, and sometimes, too, in the larger one of the imperial court. But the Syrian ascetics also reflected their times. By the end of the sixth century, even the vitality of this movement had been worn down.

John of Ephesus and his *Lives of the Eastern Saints* provide an opportunity to learn about life in a time and place of drastic events. Here we

can see the ways in which those who have chosen extreme lives are forced by external circumstances into extremities even more severe. In writing the stories of holy men and women whom he had known, John shows us the confrontation between extreme experience and the human necessity of shaping that experience through narrative.

The hesitation that scholars have shown in the instance of John's *Lives* in fact stems largely from its literary form. For despite John's personal acquaintance with his subjects, and despite his professed intention to record in the *Lives* only what he himself has seen or can verify, hagiography alters both an author's material and its presentation. The nature of hagiography does not invalidate the historicity of John's *Lives*, but it does require that we read the text with a particular understanding.

Hagiography is a literary genre in which form is as important as content in understanding the text. Its task is to render the world of human experience comprehensible. It does this in two ways: first, by celebrating the saint (whether real or legendary) as one through whom God acted in the realm of human life; and second, by using a standardized language of literary *topoi* that identified the saint as saint and interpreted the saint's work as that of divine agency. Recognizing the formulaic, non-historical language of hagiography opens the route for treating the standardization itself as historical material. These texts offer us historical information, even in the most stringent sense, only if we can ask the appropriate questions. Standardization in hagiographical language is not a static matter. Favorite themes change; and the criteria of sanctity itself change in accordance with fluctuations in the values of society. Standard hagiographical themes, their periods of fashion and forms of expression, reveal the subconscious concerns of their societies and serve to establish a larger sense of order for those whom they are written to guide.

How, then, can we approach hagiography so as to evaluate the interaction of formulaic and historical material? The text must be heard on its own terms as well as in its hagiographical context; one must separate the standardized material from the author's perspective and establish how and why the author is using the hagiographic medium. There are clues internal to the text: the author's style, emphases, choices and viewpoints, and the author's position as distinct from the subject's. There are also external clues by which to measure the internal evidence: other sources—hagiographical, archaeological, archival, historiographical—and other information can be brought to bear upon the text. The consistency and coherence of a text, the interplay between an author's intent and content, analyses of comparative and contrasting material—all of

these matters are tools by which we can listen more carefully to a text. In the listening, we can discern what the text is saying, and what we can learn from it.

John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints* is a work of hagiography in the historical rather than the legendary tradition of saints' lives. Unlike many works of this kind, John's collection is not primarily stereotyped or didactic. It is a work incorporating a strikingly personal element, as John not only participated in much of what he sets down but also is actively present in his role as author. In the present study, John himself stands at the center. As will be seen, his individualistic manner is constantly apparent; more than a matter of style, John produces a form of hagiography peculiarly his own. His circumstances do much to encourage his individuality.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship and interaction between asceticism and society in the sixth-century Byzantine East. In particular, we are concerned with how this relationship works for the Monophysite ascetics, what factors influenced it, and what the consequences and implications may have been.

How do we see the particular historical circumstances reflected in the ascetic experience John describes hagiographically? As John tells us, it was a time when stylites descended from their pillars to enter the arena of religious controversy; anchorites returned to towns and cities to care for the laity in the absence of exiled church leaders; exile became a part of monastic practice; the needs of the laity overrode the sentiments of bishops in the formation of a separate church hierarchy; and women took leadership roles they would otherwise have shunned. The situation of religious controversy was compounded by war with Persians, invasions by Huns, extended famine, bubonic plague, and collective hysteria. We can see the contrast of Mesopotamia in its calamity with the expansion and prosperity experienced elsewhere in the Byzantine Empire during the first half of the sixth century; we can see also the contrast of provincial life to that of the cosmopolitan centers, whether Antioch, Jerusalem, or Constantinople. Our goal here is to break the religious experience down into its component parts, in search of the meaning ascribed to the larger event.

Establishing the historicity of John's text is thus neither the methodology nor the point of this study, nor does it attempt to prove a thesis. Rather, it seeks to see a situation: What is the story John tells? How are we to understand it? This is not a book about John of Ephesus as a historian. I chose to write about his *Lives* because they are not the history of his time but rather the story of the people who live in his world. I will

utilize his *Ecclesiastical History* only as a complementary supplement to the *Lives*. My purpose is to understand what Syriac spirituality meant to these people, both those who practiced an ascetic career and those who did not.

Consequently, this is also not a book about the Monophysite movement, nor is its originating point of reference the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Rather, the point of origin is Syrian asceticism, its roots and development. In this particular instance, the ascetics are also Monophysites. While the church crisis colored their situation, as the book emphasizes, they are not themselves the entire Monophysite body (far from it), nor are they the reason for the separation of the churches. Their spirituality, their asceticism, and their responses to the crises of their times do not depend on their Monophysitism but rather on their Syriac heritage. The continuity of that heritage is ultimately more important than the change brought by persecution.

Because the material is generally unfamiliar to scholars and students of late antiquity, this study starts with an introduction to the Syrian Orient of the sixth century. I do this by focusing on particular texts that illustrate the themes important for John of Ephesus; there is a context in which the ascetic practice John records makes sense in practical as well as symbolical terms. Syrian asceticism did not develop through a sequence of events. It developed in a collective experience, in which individuals and communities pursued a variety of goals for various reasons. The people rather than the events were the determining factors, and they overlapped, clashed, and harmonized in patterns rather than in a clear progression. The same is true of the spirituality studied in this book. Events affected it and forced people to make certain decisions or changes; those circumstances are central to this study insofar as they reveal the people and their spirituality more clearly.

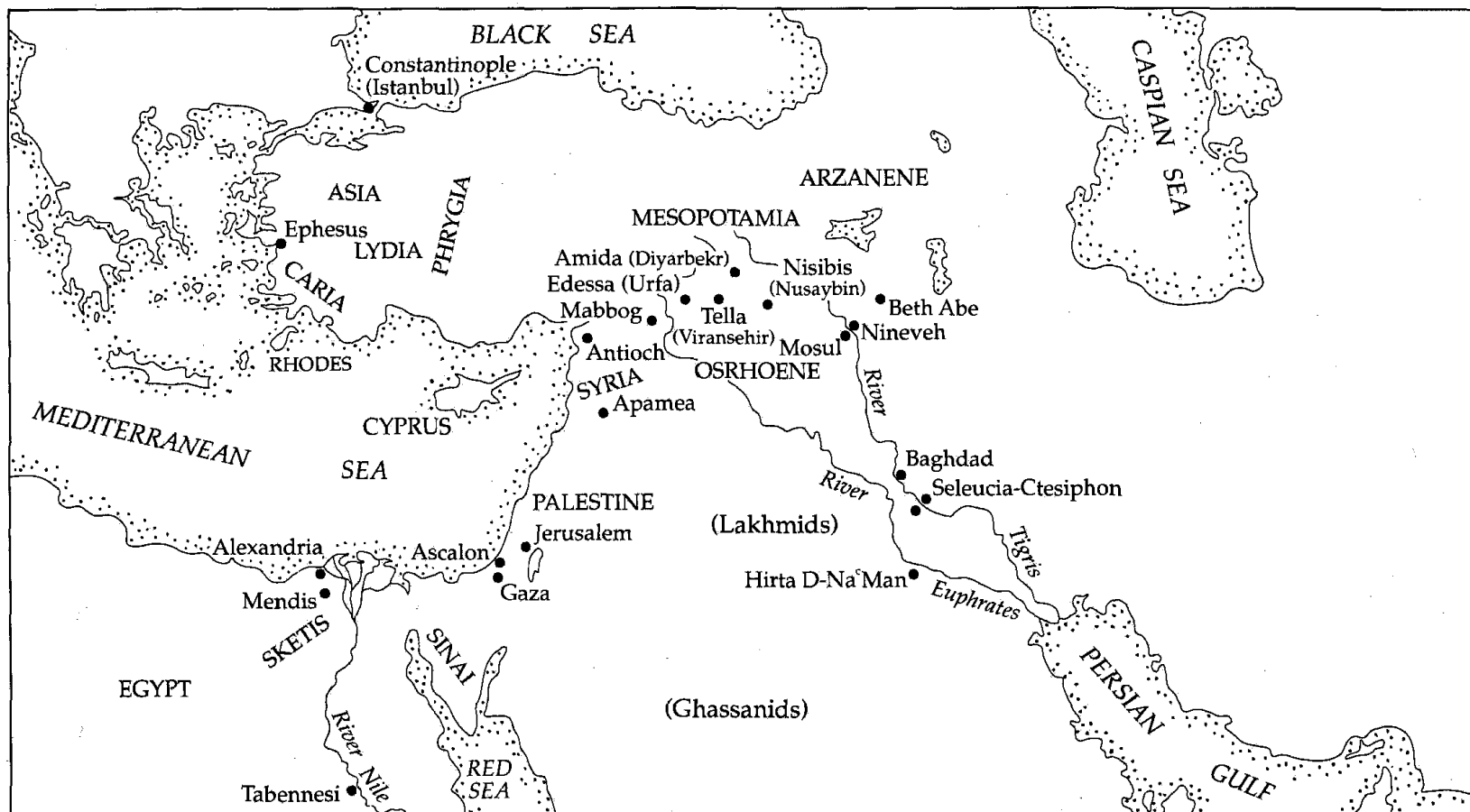
The first chapter then introduces John himself, his writings, and the literary issues of the *Lives*. The following chapters focus on those events that shaped John's collection: the development of asceticism in a time of crisis (chapter 2); the plague of madness in the city of Amida, as a collective societal response to the years of calamity (chapter 3); the impact of exile on monastic practice, and the functioning of monastic communities as refugee camps (chapter 4); mission, the breakdown of Byzantine imperial ideology in the East, and the formation of separate churches (chapter 5); the fluctuating position of women (chapter 6); and, finally, an assessment of John's hagiographical purpose (chapter 7).

In using John's *Lives* to the end, we will work with the awareness that John is writing hagiography for a specific reason and with a specific

intent. In order to see what John is doing and how and why he does it, the *Lives* will be treated throughout this study together with contrasting and complementary writings of late antiquity, both Greek and Syriac. We will seek to clarify the singular experience contained in the work. These are particular people in a particular world. To see them on their own terms and to hear their story as truly theirs is to touch history as a living thing.

Hagiography is about a theology of activity. The careers of the saints are one expression of this theology. The writing of hagiography is another.

Since no one can speak for John of Ephesus better than he himself, I have illustrated this study with his own words as much as possible. For the most part I quote from the translation of E. W. Brooks, though occasionally I have altered the text or, where noted, substituted my own.



John of Ephesus's World

INTRODUCTION: JOHN'S WORLD

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Syriac began as a dialect of Aramaic, spoken in the region of Edessa early in the first century of the Christian Era.¹ It grew quickly as both the primary vernacular and literary language of the Syrian Orient: the Roman provinces of Mesopotamia, Syria, Osrhoene, and their neighboring Persian provinces. But it became, too, the *lingua franca* over a much wider area of the eastern Roman frontier. It was used by traders throughout the East, in Persia and into India, and as far into the Latin West as Gaul.² Over time, Syriac built an impressive cultural and literary strength in its own right.³ Its survival to this day in southeastern Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and parts of India has been largely due to its hold as a religious force in the liturgies of the Syriac-speaking churches. Although the Middle Ages under Islamic domination brought a serious decline in Syriac literature, apart from that for liturgical or ecclesiastical use, recent generations have brought a renewal of it once again.⁴

Throughout its existence, Syriac has been a language in tension with other, more influential languages. Perhaps more than any other factor, this has shaped its history. It may have been spurred to full development as a reaction against its religious setting in the first century: the Jewish and pagan connotations of Aramaic and Greek facilitated Syriac's adoption as a cultural vehicle for Christianity, particularly in a geographical area where the population prided itself on the primacy of an early affirmation of the Christian faith, in contrast (or so Edessans claimed) to the

Greco-Latin realm.⁵ Indeed, Syriac has remained for the most part a Christian language, producing a primarily religious literature. Furthermore, unlike Greek, which struggled in late antiquity to reconcile Hellenic tradition and Christian context in its literary forms, Syriac developed as a Christian medium; relatively young as a literary language, it was free of the archaizing pressure exerted on Hellenic literature. Once begun, its development came quickly.⁶

The Syrian Orient was less submissive to the ascendancy of Hellenic aesthetics than the provinces of Asia Minor, in part because after the Roman conquests this area had maintained a degree of political autonomy longer than had the western provinces. Its culture represented the inheritance of the ancient Near East—Babylon, Assyria, Palestine, and influence from the Arab peninsula.⁷ During the early Christian period, Hellenism was present as a strand within this sophisticated matrix, and our earliest Christian texts from this region circulated in both Greek and Syriac versions.⁸ Hellenic philosophy appears in the theological speculations of Bardaisan of Edessa (d. 222) and in some of the heretical movements, especially Marcionism and, later, Arianism (causing Ephrem Syrus to rail against the “poison . . . of the Greeks”).⁹ But it does not emerge as a dominant force until the fifth and sixth centuries. The Syrian Orient was Christianized mainly through semitic Judaism rather than pagan religion or philosophy; its religious culture continued to reflect that heritage and differed from those of the Greco-Latin churches accordingly.¹⁰ There was, too, a further cultural factor involved: the Syrian Orient was the trading crossroad that brought East and West together. The wealth of artistic and religious influences that mingled in this area generated a literary fertility evident in the Greek as well as in the Syriac writing produced in the eastern Roman provinces.¹¹

Thus in the syncretism of the late antique Greco-Roman world, Syriac language and culture were in a position to give as well as to take—unlike, for example, their Coptic counterparts in Egypt or the Armenians to the north.¹² The position of Syriac was strengthened further by the growth of its own academies during the second half of the fourth century. Edessa was the first city of the Syrian Orient to gain recognition as a center of scholarship, though the school in Edessa had been transferred from its original location at Nisibis. In the fifth century, religious persecutions against the Nestorians led to the spread of Syriac schools into Persia, where they flourished perhaps most illustriously again at Nisibis.¹³ The existence of the Syriac academies was to some degree responsible for the way in which Hellenism infiltrated Syriac culture. The use of Syriac as the teaching language and the consequent task of trans-

lating Greek literature, particularly under pressure for theological dialogue, caused a gradual impact, one in which Greek gained the greater privilege in the eyes of the Syriac literati during the fifth and sixth centuries.¹⁴

Despite the antipathy of Greek culture to outside ("barbarian") influences, Syriac succeeded in creating a two-way interaction. Although translations of Syriac texts into Greek are minimal compared with those in reverse, what was chosen to be translated from Syriac is important.¹⁵ Syriac hymnography made an early and lasting impression on Greek literature. The fourth-century hymns of Ephrem Syrus were translated into Greek during the poet's own lifetime; the form and imagery he developed probably provided the inspiration for the later Greek *kontakion*, especially as crafted by Romanos Melodos.¹⁶ Not unrelated, perhaps, was the attraction felt toward certain Syriac mystical writings, a tradition culminating with Isaac of Nineveh in the seventh century and John the Solitary in the eighth. These were translated and used in Byzantine monasteries, deeply affecting Byzantine spirituality.¹⁷

But hagiography was undoubtedly the sphere in which Syriac made its greatest contribution because its legends and themes were more important than its literary forms. Influence could be exerted not through translations or aesthetic issues—both areas in which Greek was grudgingly receptive—but through the stories themselves. The legends of Euphemia and the Goth, Alexius the Man of God, Sergius and Bacchus, Cosmas and Damian, Pelagia the Penitent, to name but the obvious ones, are all examples of stories originating in the Syrian Orient (Cosmas and Damian may in fact have been Arabs),¹⁸ which were told and retold in a variety of versions, in numerous languages, and which sparked related motifs that flourished too.¹⁹

During the fifth century, the influence of Hellenism increased in Syriac culture, language, and literature, fueled above all by the Christological disputes that broke out over the course of that century.²⁰ The ensuing pressure for dialogue with the Greek theologians and with the imperial government at Constantinople led to a change in translation techniques that mirrored a larger cultural shift: the translation of Greek into Syriac became increasingly precise, with the emphasis (and thus the prestige) placed on faithfulness to the Greek text, whatever the result in Syriac. The need to interact effectively with Greek leaders and theologians created a need for Greek-educated Syrian scholars; indeed, the majority of Syriac writers and translators between the fifth and seventh centuries acquired their academic training in Greek-speaking centers.²¹

However, the theological controversies led to more than linguistic

change. In the effort to make dialogue more effective, Syrian theologians had to gain skills in Greek intellectual disciplines. By the sixth century, many Syrians reveal marked Hellenic influence on their thought and theological dialectic; significantly, despite the continuing development of Syriac thought,²² the learned Greek theologian Severus of Antioch provided the "Monophysite" system on which Syrian Orthodoxy has rested ever since.²³

The full impact of Hellenism on the Syrian Orient can be seen during the sixth century, but the shift was not in itself destructive. The decline of Syriac language and literature came later, under Arab rule, when the linguistic similarity of the two languages surely aided the rapid adoption of the rulers' tongue.²⁴ The sixth century, instead, witnessed a creative integration of Hellenic and Semitic thought: a situation that briefly shone with promise. This was the cultural juncture at which John of Ephesus wrote his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, and in which his stories are set.

CULTURE AND RELIGION: EARLY GROUPS AND FEATURES

The most striking feature of early Syrian Christianity, and the most difficult to assess, is its inherent asceticism. For the early church of the Syrian Orient, asceticism was not a marginal phenomenon, an activity of extremists hovering at the fringes of the mainstream Christian church; nor was it an external element, arriving from the "exotic" religions of the East and assimilated into the budding Christian ethos. Extremists there were, and external influences there were. But for the early Christian communities of the Syrian Orient, asceticism was at the heart of Christian understanding and Christian life.²⁵

During the fourth century, a common movement prevailed throughout the Christian communities of the Roman Empire: to bring the various forms of Christianity as a whole into conformity, in essence following the characteristics of the "mainstream" Greco-Latin churches. This movement brought a number of changes to the texture of Syriac spirituality. One such change was the idea that asceticism could be a separate vocation within Christianity, distinct from the practices of the laity and from the requirements of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.²⁶ But in earliest Syrian Christianity, asceticism held a fundamental place. It was basic to the Syrian understanding of the Bible, both in model and in precept; it was essential sacramentally; and it was devotional, practiced to various

degrees by the laity as well as by the consecrated. Moreover this ascetically toned spirituality is found in almost all forms of early Christianity in the Syrian Orient, whatever the particular perspective—"orthodox," Gnostic, Marcionite, or Manichean.²⁷

Syrian Christianity inherited from Judaism²⁸ a religious tradition that stressed the importance of behavior. Both the Old and the New Testaments gave ample witness that devotion to God meant pursuing God's purpose with body as well as with soul, starting with the abandonment of society's comforts—family, home, and community. Moses, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, and Paul, as well as Christ, were favorite models for the Syrians. Here as elsewhere, the Syrian Orient displayed the tendency to literalize symbols; that is, the literal and figurative aspects of interpretation were seen to be the same, and so too were one's actions and their symbolic meanings.²⁹ Asceticism as symbolic behavior provided the believer the means for enacting biblical images of salvation. The significance of asceticism was enhanced by the particular Bible in use: Tatian's *Diatessaron* was until the fifth century the most popular version of the Gospels in the Syrian Orient, and often the only one. Tatian not only edited the Gospels into a harmony but further made clear by his editing and manner of translation (sometimes close to paraphrase) that renunciation was the model presented in the Gospels and was indeed demanded of the Christian believer in all circumstances.³⁰

The influence of the *Diatessaron* encouraged those who saw the Christian ideal of renunciation in terms of a dualist understanding: the material world and the physical body were inferior to those of the spiritual realm, if not outright channels for evil. There were, however, further Biblical models developed in early Christian writings that were not grounded in a dualist perspective but led nonetheless to an ascetic basis for Christian life; and these, in the ethos of Syrian spirituality, were seen to present models for literal, physical translation into the life of the believer.

In the earliest Christian sources from the Syrian Orient (as elsewhere in the Christian realm), a favorite epithet for Christ was the Heavenly Bridegroom.³¹ The marriage feast parables in the Gospels produced an imagery through which Christian believers understood themselves as betrothed to Christ, an image developed early on in Syrian baptismal tradition.³² By this image, the believer was declared wholly given to God, body and soul. Celibacy was an ubiquitous value in early Syrian Christianity. But celibacy was not necessarily a matter of refusing to participate in the imperfection of the physical world. It was a matter of being utterly devoted to God. Body and soul were in this view inseparable.

Thus into the third century, and perhaps longer, celibacy was often a vow taken at baptism, or later after having one or two children.³³ Two categories of celibacy were recognized: the *bthūle*, "virgins," and the *qaddīshe*, "holy ones," the married who practiced continence. Spiritual marriage, the way of the *qaddīshe*, was commonly followed as a means of combining the social functions of marriage with the life of faith.³⁴ Indeed, when the mainstream church attempted to curtail the practice of spiritual marriage in Christian communities during the late third century and thereafter, the Syrian Orient proved the most difficult to change in this respect. The idea of celibacy was, for Syrian spirituality, more than an ideal; it was fundamental. Hence, in earliest Syrian Christianity, the word *bthūlā*, "virgin," could also mean "Christian," whether male or female, lay or religious.³⁵

The growth of the *bnay* and *bnath qyāmā*, consecrated lay offices for both men and women, was also important. Well-established as a part of Syriac Christianity by the third century, these "Covenanters," or "Sons and Daughters of the Covenant," lived a celibate and regulated life—by the fifth century, canonically ruled—and served the Church while living in the Christian community. They functioned together with the normative ecclesiastical structure and were a feature of the Syriac churches that survived into the Islamic period. The Sons and Daughters of the Covenant were organized as a kind of elite congregation within the church, offering a vocational form of Christian life available to the laity.³⁶ Emphasis on celibacy and service to the church, then, were widely found in Syriac Christianity before the growth of a separate ascetic movement.

The eschatological settings of the marriage feast parables in the New Testament also encouraged the ascetic nature of Syriac Christianity.³⁷ To engage in activities that furthered the existence of this earthly life only delayed the inevitable—and desired—arrival of the eschaton.³⁸ Christ as Second Adam had opened the gates of Paradise anew for those who were saved and promised their return to that state of grace lived by the First Adam and Eve before the Fall.³⁹ To hasten the fulfillment of this event, the believer lived in its expectation and sought in every way possible not to contribute to the continuing existence of this earthly realm, for example, by the procreation of children.

But even further, the Syrian understanding brought a literal living out of life in the eschatological Paradise, as prefigured by Adam and Eve. More than a matter of celibacy, this understanding sometimes led the believer to adopt a life of stark symbolism: living naked in the wilderness exposed to the elements, eating only raw fruit and herbs, dwelling among the wild beasts, and leading an unbroken life of prayer. These

precursors of the monastic movement understood the Christian life in its absolute sense; the believer was saved and so no longer part of the fallen world.⁴⁰ The believer lived what the true eschatological reality promised. To live as if it had already come was to hasten its actual coming; but there was, too, a palpable sense that to live as if it had already come was to accomplish its actuality.

Early Syrian Christianity evoked extreme action through a spirituality that called for lived symbols. Such action pointed to one more characteristic intensifying the sense that Christianity without asceticism was incomplete (perhaps even unthinkable):⁴¹ that is, the idea of "singleness."⁴² A notion rooted in Judeo-Christianity's emphasis on single-minded devotion to God, "singleness" gave particular meaning to the ideal of celibacy. The believer was to be single-mindedly focused on the divine; the believer lived a single, unmarried life to enable that focus. Christ himself had lived such a "single" life of devotion to God's purpose. In Syriac, the word meaning "single one," *ihidāyā*, was also used to connote Christ as the "only begotten" ("single") one of God; it became a word commonly used for and interchangeable with other technical terms for the ascetic or the monk. Just as in earliest Syrian Christian terminology the word meaning "virgin," *bthūlā*, could also mean "Christian," so too the word for "single one" (and indeed, for "only begotten") could also mean an ascetic and later a monk.

Thus from various sources Syriac spirituality nourished the conviction that to be a Christian was to be single-minded, and to be celibate, and to live a life of renunciation. The roots of Syrian asceticism, then, surpassed those of dualism. Traditionally, scholars have sought to understand the phenomenon of early Syrian asceticism in terms of a dualistic ethos, which was in fact distinctly bred into the popular religious culture of late antiquity, particularly in the Christian East.⁴³ The major heretical groups present in the Syrian Orient shared an understanding that separated the spiritual and physical realms and from various angles glorified celibacy. The Marcionites sought to fulfill literally the apostolic injunction that in Christ there is neither male nor female; the Manicheans and some Gnostics understood matter to be evil and so encouraged dissociation from it; baptism was interpreted in some groups as betrothal to Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom, and thus reduced earthly marriage to adultery.⁴⁴

The presence of such a strongly dualistic mind-set could not but affect the wider popular attitudes of the Syrian Orient during the early Christian centuries. The ideas discussed earlier here—renunciation, celibacy, Paradise fulfilled, and singleness—all lend themselves easily to

dualistic developments. Certainly, such developments did take place and are to some extent responsible for the direction that Syrian asceticism took when it emerged during the course of the fourth century as an autonomous and defined movement within the orthodox Christian culture.⁴⁵ But it would be misleading to regard heterodox dualism as the only source of Syrian asceticism. On the contrary, the most influential and enduring aspect of early Syrian Christianity was the concept of the essential "oneness" of the believer's self, a "oneness" of body and soul. The importance of religious behavior is here placed in context: what one does with one's body is indistinguishable from what one believes.

CULTURE AND RELIGION: EARLY ASCETIC FORMS

The clearest early expression of this oneness in relation to the divine is seen in the *Odes of Solomon*, perhaps our oldest nonbiblical Syriac text.⁴⁶ Scholars have reached no consensus on the original language of these hymns—Greek or Syriac—or on their date: theories range from the late first to the third century, with the late second century being the most likely.⁴⁷ But there is no doubt that they are Syrian in provenance, and they illustrate this aspect of Syrian spirituality particularly well. The *Odes* reflect an all-consuming love of God, with the imagery of betrothal as much a bodily experience as a spiritual understanding.⁴⁸ There is a sensuousness, an intense physicality to the expression of worship in these hymns, devoid of sexuality despite the bridal imagery that underlies it.⁴⁹ So, for example, Ode 40:

2. As a fountain bursts forth its water,
so my heart bursts forth the praise of the Lord,
and my lips bring forth praises to Him.
3. And my tongue becomes sweet by His anthems,
and my limbs are anointed by His odes.
4. My face rejoices in His exultation,
and my spirit exults in His love,
and my soul shines in Him.⁵⁰

The act of self-giving is such that the believer is borne into the presence, and even into the very being of God;⁵¹ one of the greatest difficulties a scholar has with these *Odes* is to separate (in some of them) the voice of Christ from that of the believer—to such a degree is the act of union absolute. This union is played out in another image, both physical and spiritual: the believer prays in the form (position) of a cross and in

that stance is mystically lifted into the presence of God as was Christ himself.⁵² But the image is qualified: it is the cross that leads to resurrection, to the throne of glory, rather than the crucifixion that the believer symbolically becomes in the act of prayer. The distinction is crucial. Nowhere in the *Odes* do we hear of the suffering of Christ, an omission that contributed to the questionable orthodoxy of these hymns. Here the cross holds the symbol of Christ's exaltation, and of supplication; no more, but also no less.⁵³

In the fourth century, the imagery of betrothal remained primary. At the same time, the fourth century brought the first real encounter with persecution and martyrdom that the Syrian Orient had known. For the Greco-Latin churches, persecution was a recurrent if sporadic event from Christianity's beginnings. But to the east of Antioch, matters transpired differently. Apart from a brief but contained outbreak in Persia in the 270s,⁵⁴ the earliest Syriac Christian martyrdoms occurred between 306 and 310, in the instance of the Edessan martyrs Shmona, Guria, and Habib.⁵⁵ Legend later added the prestige of earlier occurrences: during the fifth century, the literary cycle of the Edessan martyrs was expanded to include the *Doctrina Addai*, recounting the martyrdom of Aggai late in the first century;⁵⁶ and the *Acts of Sharbil, Babai, and Barsamya*, whose deaths were set in Edessa in 105 (though the events described would better place them in the persecutions of Decius).⁵⁷ But we have no evidence that these earlier martyrdoms took place, and the accounts as we have them are clearly part of the literary flowering that fifth-century Edessa engendered.

Thus the Syrian Orient was able to develop its Christianity largely without the threat of martyrdom and its particular framing of devotion to God.⁵⁸ Moreover, persecution was less severe when it did come. The final persecution campaigns at the turn of the fourth century witnessed the martyrdom of several Christians in Edessa and other major cities.⁵⁹ In the 340s, the Christian communities of Persia suffered more, in widespread campaigns conducted under Shapur II and coinciding with the Roman Empire's change to a favorable policy for Christianity.⁶⁰ A result of this chronology is that Syriac martyr passions draw on the ascetic imagery of Syriac spirituality rather than the reverse—as, for example, in the *Life of Antony of Egypt*, where asceticism is named living martyrdom.⁶¹

Shmona and Guria were two Christian laymen put to death in Edessa around the year 306. An account of their martyrdoms was written soon after.⁶² In it, the two men speak without artifice: as Christians, they belong to God. Shmona says, "Our belief is our life in Christ."⁶³ Such conviction effectively transmutes the meaning of life and death. With words

heard in other Christian martyrdoms, Shmona says, "We are not dying . . . but living according to what we believe."⁶⁴ What is death is life; to live would mean to be dead. Indeed, Guria recalls the scripture, "He who loses his life for my sake shall find it."⁶⁵ They draw comfort from the stories they have heard of martyrs in other times and other places.⁶⁶ In sharp contrast to the contemporary accounts of martyrs by Eusebius of Caesarea, they are in no way "prepared" or "trained" to meet this event, as Eusebius' philosopher martyrs had been.⁶⁷ Equally striking is the absence of Satan's presence in these stories and in those of the other Edessan martyrs. The officials involved are portrayed as horrid enough but are never identified with the Adversary, as so often happens in Greek and Latin martyrs' passions.⁶⁸

Shortly after these two deaths, the deacon Habib met a similar fate in Edessa. His story, by the same author, is even more emphatic.⁶⁹ When Habib refuses to make sacrifice even after severe torture, the governor exclaims in exasperation, "Does your doctrine teach you to hate your bodies?"⁷⁰ The governor implies either that Habib can utterly disregard his body or that he delights in the demise of his physical existence to the greater glory of his spiritual one—both ideas dear to Eusebius, as others.⁷¹ But Habib responds with the simplicity of his Syrian predecessors: "We do not hate our bodies. We are taught that he who loses his life shall find it."⁷² Rather than distinguishing between his body and his soul, Habib questions what true life and true death are, the question raised by the action of Christ in the resurrection.⁷³ Both the governor's question and Habib's response were repeated in the later account of the martyrdom of Sharbil, written contemporaneously with Simeon the Stylite's ascent on his pillar and the outcry of similar protest that his action provoked.⁷⁴

Together these texts make no body/soul distinction but rather speak of life and death as matters for which the physical and spiritual meanings are inseparable. And in that statement we have a reasonable summary of what asceticism means, a meaning held equally by both Western and Eastern Christians: to be dead to the world as it is and alive to existence in the kingdom of God, an existence actualized by the ascetic's practice. Here we see life and death each understood as a state of existence in its own right, and each continuous both here and in the hereafter. They are mutually exclusive of one another, both in this world and the next.

In addition to martyrdom, the fourth century brought a shift in the Syrian Orient from Christianity as an ascetic religion to Christianity as a religion with asceticism as a possible vocation. The shift is marked in the

writings of Aphrahat the Persian (fl. 336–345) and Ephrem Syrus (d. 373), both “proto-monks” in the movement towards monastic communities.

Aphrahat is primarily concerned with celibacy as the starting point of Christian vocation.⁷⁵ It is the mark not only of betrothal to Christ, a joyful gift freely given and freely received,⁷⁶ but also of the call to participate in the holy cosmic war against the Adversary.⁷⁷ In his *Demonstration* 6, “On the Bnay Qyāmā,” Aphrahat interweaves the concepts of betrothal to Christ, renunciation, service, holy war, and eschatology in a rich tapestry of biblical imagery and models representing a tradition he has inherited, the roots of which may well stem from Qumran and early sectarian Judaism.⁷⁸ He does not speak of the body as something to be subjugated to the soul—language pervading the roughly contemporary *Life of Antony*. Rather, body and soul are God’s, as one; both are for His use and His work.

It is Ephrem who extols the exquisite beauty of betrothal as an image, addressing Christ the Heavenly Bridegroom, “The soul is your bride / the body your bridal chamber.”⁷⁹ Or again, “O Lord, may the body be a temple for its builder / may the soul be a palace of praise for its architect.”⁸⁰ For Ephrem, alienation of body and soul is the result of the Fall. In his *Hymns on Nisibis* 69, he writes:

3. . . . for you had joined them together in love, but they had parted and separated in pain.
4. The body was fashioned in wisdom, the soul was breathed in through grace,
love was infused in perfection—but the serpent separated it in wickedness.
5. Body and soul go to court to see which caused the other to sin;
but the wrong belongs to both, for free will belongs to both.

Now, however, the work of the incarnation has reconciled them once again:

14. Make glad the body with the soul; return the soul to the body;
Let them have joy at each other, for they were separated but are returned and joined once more.⁸¹

Thus Ephrem can rejoice, “We love our bodies, which are akin to us, of the same origin.”⁸² And he can write this way at the same time that others are describing the startling Syrian ascetics living naked in the wilderness, their hair like eagles’ feathers, physically enacting the image of life before the Fall, the true life of the saved believer.⁸³ It was Ephrem, too, who could exhort that virginity alone without acts of service was an insufficient offering to God, and that chaste marriage combined with

good works could be a better way: "their conduct having filled the place of virginity. For . . . their spirit was bound in the love of their Lord . . . with the desire for Him permeating all their limbs."⁸⁴

The common thread that ties the early varieties of Syrian Christianity to an orthodox tradition is the understanding that body and soul must be united in the act of devotion. What changes over time are the context and circumstances in which the thread is found. In Syriac martyr passions, one finds a commentary on the meaning of asceticism: suffering, or hatred of the body, is neither the goal nor the purpose, but devotion of the whole self is. Aphrahat and Ephrem write about the meaning of devotion to God at a time when Syrian asceticism is shifting toward a defined movement. The extremity that came to characterize Syrian asceticism during the fifth and sixth centuries is well known. It may be that its harshness reflects the impact of the earlier dualistic ethos, or indeed the incorporation of the martyr experience into a spirituality that had come to bloom without that threat. Yet Aphrahat and Ephrem offer witness that the increasing extremity was not born only out of influence from a dualistic ethos but also could come from the search to live out, with one's whole self, betrothal (self-giving) to God.⁸⁵

The two figureheads for Syrian ascetic tradition, praised in the hymns of their own day as well as in later legend, were Jacob of Nisibis (d. 338) in Persia and Julian Saba (d. 366/367) in Mesopotamia.⁸⁶ Each took to the wilderness to focus solely on the divine.

Jacob was a solitary in the mountains outside Nisibis.⁸⁷ During the spring, summer, and autumn seasons he lived exposed in the brush with the sky for his roof. In winter, he stayed in a cave. He ate only wild plants and denied himself the comfort of fire (for warmth or for cooking) and of clothing, having only his hair for a tunic. His spiritual excellence brought rewards: whatever he asked, God granted, blessing him further with the gift of prophecy. Not surprisingly, Jacob's virtue was discovered by others, and he was ordained bishop of Nisibis. He left his mountains but did not change his way of life. As bishop, he pursued a career of public good works and private asceticism. During the Arian crisis, Jacob traveled to the Council of Nicea to battle for orthodoxy. During the Persian siege of Nisibis he worked among the populace, strengthening their defense and sabotaging the efforts of the Persian soldiers. In the eyes of his public, his effective leadership was the result of his effective asceticism.

Julian Saba's life followed a parallel but contrasting course.⁸⁸ Julian, too, was an anchorite. He lived in a cave in the desert of Osrhoene and ate once a week, restricting his diet to meager quantities of barley bread, salt, and spring water. Prayer and psalmody were his primary activities. Julian's way of life brought him growing fame and soon a growing band

of disciples. They settled in nearby caves, ate as he did, and under his leadership practiced an asceticism of prayer, psalmody, and labor. Over time Julian's renown spread, and so too did testimonies to the deeds wrought by his prayers. Like Jacob, Julian returned for a time to society to work in opposition to the Arian challenge. Once he was taken seriously ill but worked his own cure by prayer as he had done for many others. Theodoret of Cyrrhus wrote that the illness was a reminder of Julian's humanity.⁸⁹ Appropriately, Julian died in the quiet of his desert home.

Both Jacob and Julian found that the course of their ascetic withdrawal led them back to human society: for Jacob, by ordination to the see of Nisibis, and for Julian, by the growth around him of an ascetic community. Both worked to express divine purpose through action. Both saw fit to reenter worldly affairs by intervening in the crises of war and religious controversy. Neither claimed that his holy resolution absolved him of such commitments. Above all, neither softened his private way of life. The example they set terrified their enemies. It was said that armies were turned and dragons slain by their act of prayer.⁹⁰

Jacob and Julian represent the archetypal Syrian saint, and their stories can be seen as blueprints for the hagiographies to follow. Within their mold, the Syrian Orient developed its ascetic tradition, centering on the individual whose life of devotion gained authority in both the divine and human realms. Yet the earlier features of Syriac Christianity were not supplanted. A separate ascetic institution began to arise during the fourth century, but its demarcation was not always clear. The tradition of the lay ascetic remained, the individual who lived a regulated life of chastity and prayer within society and who served the needs of the local congregation. Ephrem Syrus was himself one such individual, working tirelessly for the bishops of Nisibis and Edessa and known for his exceptional efforts on behalf of the needy when Edessa suffered a famine.⁹¹ There continued in Syrian Christianity the understanding that faith required vocational activity and commitment from its adherents. At the same time, the growth of asceticism as an institution raised other issues for the Syrian Christian community.

ASCETICISM AND SOCIETY

During the fourth century monasticism flowered across the Christian realm, and with it a critical role for the ascetic—the holy man or woman—to play in society. By their discipline and their conscious imitation of biblical models, especially from the Gospels, the ascetics enacted

the image of Christ. To the public this was more than imitation: in the image of Christ, the holy one could do what Christ had done. The ascetics could intercede for divine mercy, and they could be instruments of divine grace in this world; they were a channel between humanity and God that worked in both directions. The ascetic was the point at which the human and the holy met.⁹²

Moreover, the ascetics blurred the lines separating the temporal and spiritual realms. Just as they could intercede effectively with the divine, so too could they intercede with the worldly powers below. It did not take long for the Christian community, great and small, to turn to the holy men or women for cures, exorcisms, advice, justice, and judgments in affairs private and public, personal and civil. Often seen as an attempt to leave the worldly for the spiritual, asceticism in fact carried heavy responsibilities in relation to the larger Christian society.⁹³

The wider empire showed developments that paralleled the basic models of Syrian asceticism.⁹⁴ In the late third and early fourth centuries Antony had paved the route out to the Egyptian desert as anchorite, and back into the temporal world when he reentered Alexandria on behalf of the Bishop Athanasius.⁹⁵ In so doing, he sharpened the task of the ascetic vocation. There had been others before him of devotional practice, recluses who lived the life of prayer. In the desert Antony redefined the ascetic as one who fought the Adversary face-to-face, in the desolate and un-Christianized wilderness. Antony made "the desert a city," sanctifying a place where God had not been present. And he did more: he brought that strength back into Christian society. Indeed, as the prophets of old—Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist—and as Christ himself, Antony faced the wilderness as prelude to a career that involved much public ministry.⁹⁶ Soon after, in Cappadocia, Basil of Caesarea both established a form of devotional community dependent on corporate discipline—his monastery / hospice / hospital complex—and caused his friend Gregory of Nazianzus to leave his retreat and enter the church's battlegrounds.⁹⁷ It was not a far step from either position to that of the monastic forces utilized by Cyril of Alexandria early in the fifth century.⁹⁸

The Syrian terrain and its vulnerable position as border country between the Roman and Persian Empires made it necessary for the early Syrian anchorites either to remain near to fortified towns or villages, as Jacob of Nisibis had done, or to bond together as a community, however loosely, as in the case of Julian Saba.⁹⁹ These factors marked Syrian asceticism with its own distinctive style. In Egypt, clear distance from the outside world was the desert's claim. Although sources indicate continual contact between the ascetics and society, both sides upheld the

ideal of that distance as a crucial element for the ascetic's vocation. In the Syrian Orient, proximity to the temporal society was a given. Even in texts describing anchorites, the dramatic isolation eulogized in Egyptian (as well as Palestinian) hagiography is rarely to be found. Furthermore, unlike Cappadocia, the structural patterns of different communities were rarely coordinated and their arrangements with the ecclesiastical organization were less elaborate.

The fifth century brought the full articulation of Syrian asceticism and established its place in relation to Christian society. Again, two figures mark the key developments: Simeon the Stylite (c. 386–459) outside Antioch, and the legendary Man of God in Edessa at about the same time. These two represent the poles of traditional asceticism, the wilderness and the city; and they represent the range of relationships possible for asceticism and society, in the huge cult following of Simeon and its antithesis in the anonymity of the Man of God.

Simeon was the unparalleled star of Syrian asceticism, known in his own day (and perhaps ever after) as the great wonder of the inhabited world.¹⁰⁰ Born in Syria of Christian parents and baptized as a child, Simeon grew up tending his father's flocks. A chance encounter led to his conversion to the ascetic life, and he left his home at once. Simeon passed through two monasteries in Syria, at Tel'ada and Telneshe, in his search for his true vocation, but his propensity for severe and eccentric practice led him into conflict with the developing Syrian monastic structure. Eventually he went his own way, first as a recluse and then, around 412, as stylite, mounting the first of three pillars, each higher than the one before. On the pillar he took up his *stasis*, his stance of continual prayer. The final pillar, on which he spent roughly the last forty years of his life, was about forty cubits high (sixty feet?). It had a platform on top about six-feet square, with a railing to keep him from falling off. Exposed on the mountain with no shelter of any kind, Simeon stood on his pillar midway between heaven and earth until his death at the age of more than seventy years. His career as holy man was spectacular. During his life, his fame had spread from Britain to Persia; the pilgrims who flocked to see him crossed the spectrum of late antique society from peasant to emperor, bringing him problems as mundane as cucumber crops and as complex as foreign policy.

On top of his pillar, Simeon lived exposed to heat, sun, ice, rain, and snow. Once he nearly died from a gangrenous ulcer on his foot. He followed a rigid schedule of stationary prayer, genuflexion, and attention to the pilgrims below. He was tended by disciples who climbed the pillar by ladder to bring him the sparse food he ate once each week when he

was not fasting. A monastic community grew up around the pillar base, which served not only the stylite but also the pilgrims who came. Twice a day Simeon would interrupt his prayer routine to hear problems and address exhortations to the crowds below. He judged disputes, addressed the affairs of the Church, proclaimed against heresy, and sent advice to the emperor, foreign kings, and other high officials; he preached, healed, exorcised, prophesied, and blessed the endless crowds.¹⁰¹

We possess three contemporary vitae for Simeon. Although we have nothing from his own words that explains why he climbed the pillar, these three sources offer different perspectives on what he was doing and why. Their differences are instructive. Theodoret of Cyrrhus wrote about Simeon in his *Historia religiosa* while the saint was still alive (c. 444), when he had been on the pillar twenty-eight years and his cult was in full glory.¹⁰² Theodoret uses the frame of Hellenic tradition to present Simeon as one for whom body and soul are mutually antagonistic in a battle of wills that forms the central focus for Simeon's career. To seek the resolution of the conflict, Simeon adopted a life of discipline and virtue in order to subjugate his body to his will. He represents the true philosopher, one who seeks the life of virtue by turning his mind wholly to the spiritual world above. In subduing his body to his soul, Simeon achieves an inward harmony through which he can turn the whole of his heart to God. Theodoret calls this the "angelic life"; for him, Simeon's ascent on the pillar represented his search for escape from the physical world. It was the "fatigue," the "unbearable toil"¹⁰³ from the weight of the world that drove him to be apart up on his pillar: he sought to "fly heavenward."¹⁰⁴

Theodoret also takes the time to draw from an apologia apparently prepared by Simeon's monastic community and utilized also by the writers of Simeon's Syriac vita.¹⁰⁵ From this he defends Simeon's career as one that follows the Old Testament prophets: in seeking to reveal the will of God, the prophets often resorted to shocking behavior, which was as essential for their work as the message they spoke. But this is not where Theodoret finds the real key to Simeon's vocation; he focuses instead on the achieved discipline of the virtuous life.

In another vein altogether is the Syriac vita composed by the saint's disciples soon after his death.¹⁰⁶ It represents the saint's official story, the "authorized" version put out either by the community that continued to tend his shrine in its context as a major pilgrimage site or by those close to this community. Here there is no division of body and soul. Here, Simeon's conversion to the religious life is an act of love, the giving of himself into the very hands of God. "[He] cared for nothing except how

he might please his Lord. . . . [And] he loved his Lord with all his heart."¹⁰⁷ In Theodoret's story, the capacity to work miracles was something that Simeon gained over time; it accrued to him gradually, as he attained an ever purer discipline. By contrast, in the Syriac vita Simeon was capable of miracles from the moment he gave himself over to God. This was not a grace symbolically earned or achieved; it was the mark of his unity with God.

In the Syriac text, much more space is given to the apologia for Simeon's vocation on the pillar. Major prophets whose actions had shocked their communities—Isaiah walking naked, Hosea marrying the harlot, Jeremiah wearing yoke and thongs—are cited as so many precursors to Simeon's action, and his work is presented specifically as prophetic behavior.¹⁰⁸ Moses and Elijah figure most prominently in this presentation, both as models and as spiritual guides for the stylite.¹⁰⁹ The pillar is climbed because this is what God calls him to do.¹¹⁰ Here Simeon becomes a stylite not in penitence, not to deny his body nor to discipline it, but because God requires it to fulfill his purpose.

The Syriac text places much emphasis on Simeon's cruciform prayer. But as earlier in the *Odes of Solomon*, this image is not likened to Christ's suffering on the cross. It is used to connote Christ's victorious stance in his triumph over Satan, a victory displayed again through the activity of Simeon on the pillar. The pillar itself is likened to a number of images. It is the high place from which the prophet speaks the word of God; it is the new Mount Sinai from which the new Law is dispensed; it is the crucible that purifies Simeon as gold through fire; it is the altar upon which Simeon is the incense rising heavenward as prayer; it is the mountain on which Simeon is transfigured as Christ himself was once transfigured; but Calvary it is not.¹¹¹

It is only in our third text, the Greek vita written by Antony, an alleged disciple of Simeon, that we hear of Simeon's vocation as one of penance.¹¹² For Antony, the extremity of Simeon's practice represents his response to his sinful nature as fallen man, and it is sin that holds the focus of this text. Here even the saint's capacity to work miracles does not indicate his victory over sin; it is rather a grace despite Simeon's humanity. In this text Simeon's actions are only the search to achieve adequate repentance through ceaseless abasement and punishment. Unlike the other two sources, this one presents the ugliness of the saint's vocation as exactly that, with no attempt to mitigate its brutality.

The variations in these texts reveal that even the most extreme asceticism did not represent a clear religious stance; the notion of a dualism fundamental to Christian culture can neither account for Simeon's voca-

tion nor convey its meaning.¹¹³ Rather, we are presented with a kaleidoscope of imagery, one that carries echoes from the entire spectrum of early Syrian Christianity, heterodox or orthodox.

Simeon's story illustrates another feature of the cult of saints. When he died, his body was moved to Antioch in an extraordinary procession. Seven bishops, the military governor of Syria, and an escort of six hundred soldiers accompanied the body to its resting place in the cathedral. The crowds en route were enormous. The procession took five days to reach Antioch, a distance of roughly forty miles. After his death, his cult continued to grow, with particular glory accruing to his shrine at Qal'at Sim'an housing the relic of his pillar, but figuring also at religious sites across Christendom, as far away as Gaul.¹¹⁴ There came, too, the glory of those who followed Simeon's model: stylites became an important feature of Byzantine spirituality; imitators can be found as late as the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹⁵

Contemporaneously with Simeon's life and cult, the story of the Man of God appeared in Edessa.¹¹⁶ The story itself is set in the years when Rabbula was Edessa's bishop (411–435) and was written perhaps between 470 and 475, the dates for the composition of the Syriac *Life of Simeon*. The two stories appear antithetical.

The story of the Man of God is a simple one. We do not know his name, nor the names of his parents, a noble Roman family. Born to a childless couple after many years, this son was from the beginning "an instrument chosen by God." His humility, even as a youth, was unsettling; in an effort to help him conform to the ways of the world, his parents finally arranged a marriage for him. But the Man of God fled, and making his way to Syria, he settled in Edessa as a beggar. The way of life he took on as his vocation was as simple as it was severe. He lived among the poor in the vicinity of the church, fasting and praying. He would accept a little money from the almsgivers, from which he purchased a very little food and gave the rest to others in need. At night he stayed among the poor, standing in cruciform prayer all night while they slept.

Eventually the caretaker (*paramonarius*) of the church discovered his practice, and one night begged, "Who are you and what is your work?" The saint gestured to the poor who lay sleeping around them, "Ask those in front of you, and from them you will learn who I am and whence I am, for I am one of them."¹¹⁷ It was only with the greatest difficulty that the caretaker learned the saint's story, and only after the holy man had bound him to secrecy and refused when the caretaker asked to become his disciple. But the caretaker began to imitate the Man of God, secretly

following an austere prayer practice of his own and watching over the holy man. One day while the caretaker was away, the saint died; anonymous in death as in life, he was buried in the cemetery of the poor. In great distress, the caretaker poured out the story to Bishop Rabbula, begging that the body be taken back from the graveyard and with proper burial laid "in a known place,"¹¹⁸ to be granted due veneration. But the saint's body could not be found, only the rags in which he had lain.

We have no way of knowing whether or not there is a historical basis to this story. It may have been inspired by such an ascetic, or it may have been a simple didactic tale; either way, the message remains the same. In the story we are shown two responses to the life of this saint. First, the Bishop Rabbula is spurred by the meaning of the saint's presence in the city to undertake service to the poor and destitute, in honor of the saint's identity with them (and indeed, Rabbula was famed for his work with the needy).¹¹⁹ As for the *paramonarius*, he undertook the continuation of the saint's prayer practice and the telling of the saint's story. But so well did he understand it that he preserved the humility of his master even then. Himself anonymous, he wrote a story that gives us a saint with no teachings, no miracles, no body, no tomb, and no name.¹²⁰

A greater contrast to Simeon would be hard to imagine. On his pillar, Simeon was both in the world and above it. Further, he lived in a space well separated from the urban world; up in the mountains, the world came out to Simeon to seek his aid. As his cult grew, the enclosure built around him and his attendant monastic community created a buffer between the saint and his suppliants that was far more efficient than the height of his pillar. Simeon's practice made him visible to all and thus gave the sense that he was accessible to all.¹²¹ But despite the generosity of his works, Simeon could be reached only by his chosen few. One obtained intercession from Simeon through the intercession of his disciples. The separation was sharp enough to confuse his pilgrims as to whether he was human.¹²²

A clear-cut relationship between ascetics and society in the Syrian Orient was emerging, along with a fusion of the eremitic and cenobitic vocations, as the individual virtuosi found their practices increasingly conducted within monastic communities. Rabbula himself published canonical literature for monks and for the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant, dealing with situations both inside the religious community and out in the public sphere.¹²³ For both groups, in both spheres, he demanded a life of strict separation. There was to be little if any contact with the laity, and no contact between sexes; monastic garments and chaperones helped to demarcate the boundaries of religious life in an ur-

ban context. In the monasteries themselves, structures became clear. Both seclusion as a hermit and the use of chains or other "spiritual aids" were restricted to the most worthy in a monastery. Rabbula's legislation was strengthened by civil laws such as those exempting stylites from court appearances, which served to reinforce the practical order of religious and societal interaction.¹²⁴

The Man of God's life would seem to undermine this entire picture. He does not withdraw from the world: he goes to it. He enters the harsh reality of the destitute in a major urban center, "For I am one of them." He lives among men and women, unmarked by clothing, company, or conduct. Without even a name, he has no identity as a holy man. Where the physical separation of the holy was an essential ingredient in the work that Simeon and others like him performed for society, and where the cult of such a saint flourished both during life and after death, the Man of God was invisible in life and death, indistinguishable from the poor in the streets or in the cemetery. Alive he was no one in particular; he could have been anyone, and thus he became everyone. When his body disappeared in death, he was nowhere; he could have been anywhere, and so he was everywhere. The Man of God had just this task as his work: to reveal the presence of the holy in the midst of human life. This he did by the power of his presence alone, sanctifying the world itself and causing good works to be done by those around him—not miracles, but actions of concrete import in human society and possible for any person to perform.

In this text, too, the image of cruciform prayer is crucial. Here again, our saint is given no images of trial, testing, or punishment.¹²⁵ Rather, we are once more presented with images of transformation: from the greatness of his noble birth, to the humbleness of the poor, to the holiness of the empty tomb. The holy was where the Man of God was—in the world.

Thus at a time when popular spirituality evoked fervent followings for holy men and women and accorded their monasteries great power and influence, the Man of God provided a balancing voice. Where could the life of true devotion be lived? Where could the holy be found? And who was truly free from the cares of the world? In his story, the Man of God showed no disrespect for either city or monastery. For him, they were one and the same; life itself was vocational. This is in fact the consequence of the story. Simeon presented the holy one as sharply marked out from the general Christian community, by space, behavior, food, and intercessory activity. The Man of God took this division and forged an integration between society and the holy, for the holy could operate anywhere.

The career of Simeon and the story of the Man of God articulate the paradigm of Syrian asceticism as both an external expression and an internal reality. They reflect the variety of earlier ascetic activity in the Syrian Orient, presenting different aspects of its behavior and offering its meaning anew. Directly in their wake came John of Ephesus and the ascetics he celebrates in his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*.

RELIGION AND HISTORY

The Syrian Orient, like the larger Christian world, never contained one overarching "church" identity. During the fourth century the Council of Nicea (325) had helped to spur the general ecclesiastical movement towards conformity, though the Christian realm remained diverse as a body. By the sixth century, Christendom faced the issue of conformity with renewed intensity, and the Syrian Orient was itself a major battlefield for the conflict at hand. When John of Ephesus was born at the turn of the sixth century, the dispute over the Council of Chalcedon (451) continued heatedly, and the anti-Chalcedonian movement was reaching its peak. By the time of John's death in 589, all this had changed. Formally divided into separate church bodies, the Chalcedonian church of the Byzantine Empire and the non-Chalcedonian "Monophysite" church of the Christian Orient now stood autonomously.¹²⁶

The key issue behind the Council of Chalcedon was that of Christological definition: what exactly was the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures?¹²⁷ The Monophysites followed Cyril of Alexandria's track in asserting the continuity of the divine subject—in Jesus Christ, the divine Logos really was present in the flesh, in the world. Through the tradition of Alexandrian thought, Cyril posited what were in effect two states for the Logos, the preexistent Logos and the Logos enfleshed. His concentration on the fact that it was the Logos incarnate who suffered left him with the paradox of how Christ could "suffer without suffering." The difficulty in Cyril's way of uniting the human and the divine in Christ lay in how to maintain the full humanity of Christ without being forced to the heterodox position that the Godhead could suffer human weakness and pain.

The Chalcedonians ironically followed the route Nestorius had paved through the tradition of Antiochene thought: protection of the full divinity of the Logos by asserting the full integrity of Christ's humanity. Christ's suffering was here experienced by the man Jesus, fully human in body and soul, devised as the "temple" that the Logos had fashioned for Himself and in which He dwelt. But here the Logos was held intact at

the risk of dividing Christ into two separate beings, two natures complete and whole, one divine and one human.

The Council was also concerned with maintaining the theological alliance between East and West, and to some extent it was the concessions to Western thought that created the furor following the Council.¹²⁸ The greatest stumbling block to the resolution of theological differences seemed to be the Latin *Tome of Pope Leo*, the papal contribution to the Chalcedonian definition of faith. In order to accommodate the *Tome*, the Council had compromised its theological language, making it more specific. Thus the Chalcedonian definition affirms Christ "in two natures" rather than "out of two natures." Advocates of the Councilian decision saw the compromise as a matter of sharpening the Creed laid down at Nicea; dissenters saw it as sanctioning innovation by straying from holy tradition into heresy.

The Monophysites accused the Chalcedonians of having divided Christ in two, the error of "Nestorianism" proper, in order to affirm more precisely his humanity; and thus of worshipping a quaternity (as John of Ephesus' subjects refer to it) of Father, Spirit, Christ, and Jesus. In turn, those supporting the Council accused their antagonists of Eutychianism, uniting the two natures into one nature divine, a heresy the Monophysites themselves denounced. The Chalcedonians were concerned to protect the Logos from the blasphemy of asserting that the divine could suffer pain and the weakness of human fallibility. The differences lay in language rather than in concept.¹²⁹

The fact that both sides in the dispute shared the same claims scripturally, patristically, and traditionally—and, above all, that both rightly claimed the authority of Cyril of Alexandria—is critical. In fact, both sides believed the same faith, that declared at the Council of Nicea.¹³⁰ But certain key terms shared by the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of thought did have different connotations for their respective systems,¹³¹ and the deep-seated fear that faith must be absolutely correct, or "orthodox," in order to save, led to a rigid conservatism on both sides. Furthermore, the political interests involved bred a simplistic reductionism from the content of the language to its literal meaning. The arguments became so hardened that the essential points of agreement were obscured.¹³²

In the course of the dispute following Chalcedon, considerable movement was made theologically by both sides toward a solution incorporating both the Alexandrian and the Antiochene schools of thought. The efforts of the neo-Chalcedonian theologians, under the sponsorship of Justinian in particular, show how far the work of fusion could progress between the two traditions.¹³³

Ironically, Justinian was the emperor who sought a genuine theological resolution to the conflict, rather than a compromise. He saw the problem as one of reconciling the language of the Council with that of Cyril of Alexandria, that is, keeping Chalcedon's authority intact while resolving the knots of the theological discourse. The Council of Constantinople in 553 represented the fruits of his labors. Yet it was also Justinian who forced the political situation to polarize irrevocably and thus to render his theological work ineffectual for the Christian Orient.¹³⁴

The dispute peaked during the sixth century, both theologically and politically. But it is the daily reality of the presence of this dispute that we will find in John of Ephesus' writing. The circumstances in which the battle was fought mediated its meaning for Christian society. Matters did not stand in isolation.

The relative political stability of Anastasius' reign (491–518) seems to have been deceptive. Troubles that had seemed controllable—for example, the flare-up of the Persian campaigns between 502 and 505—began to show themselves as too deeply seated for straightforward solutions. Further complications came from a series of natural disasters occurring throughout the empire at that time: earthquakes, famine, and plague. These put strains on the empire's finances and morale, preventing an amenable context for Anastasius' policies.

The pro- and anti-Chalcedonian factions were not yet completely polarized, but relations worsened as Anastasius proved unable to achieve an equilibrium during his reign; his sympathies for the Monophysite cause forced him gradually into a stronger stance of support than he himself judged wise.¹³⁵ The measures he took showed how explosive the situation could be. The Monophysite leader Severus attained the patriarchal seat at Antioch in 512; but in Constantinople, at the same time, riots against the anti-Chalcedonians forced the emperor, without his diadem, to beg for peace in the Hippodrome and to offer abdication. Anastasius' pitiful appearance dampened the violence. But the point had been made: a hapless Syrian monk, taken to be Severus himself, had been beheaded by the rioting mob.¹³⁶

The continuation of these varied problems made a smooth route for Justin's changes in imperial policies, but they also added a sinister tone where it might not otherwise have been felt.¹³⁷ Perhaps most decisively in the course of his reign, Justin worked closely with his enigmatic nephew Justinian, who was to succeed him in 527. For some ancient historians (and for some modern ones), these two men comprised one reign.¹³⁸

During Justin's term of office, imperial interests shifted irreparably away from the eastern provinces, for years a stable source of goods,

trade, and labor, and focused on the West, a policy that culminated in Justinian's effort to reconquer Italy and North Africa. The policy was initiated on a diplomatic level. Justin and Justinian began to woo the Pope and the Roman people by taking up the Chalcedonian cause. The extent of their commitment was shown in the persecutions against the Monophysites that began in 519 soon after Justin attained office.

The commencement of the persecutions provoked instant reaction on both sides of the theological divide over Chalcedon. Severus' patriarchal reign from 512 to 518 had seen the Monophysite movement at its height, but even to contemporaries the fragility of its hold was clear.¹³⁹ Yet Justin's change in religious policy could not have appeared as decisive as it would later prove. First, the Monophysites themselves knew their ascendancy had been tenuous, and they expected further battles. And second, the persecutions were conducted against church officials and monastic communities only, leaving the body of the faithful untouched.

By imperial design, the persecutions struck hardest in the Syrian Orient, and particularly in John of Ephesus' home province of Mesopotamia. However, the new measures favoring Chalcedon by force did allow a significant loophole for the dissenters. Egypt was exempted from the persecutions, enabling Monophysites to seek refuge there. Perhaps this exemption was undertaken on economic grounds, since Egypt was Constantinople's bread basket.¹⁴⁰ But Egypt was also the territory of Cyril of Alexandria. Cyril and his successor Dioscurus had drawn profoundly on the authority of their monastic comrades; the Egyptian monks had responded to the Christological crisis with a passionate involvement. Indeed, since the days of Athanasius and Antony, the Alexandrian patriarchate had fostered a heritage of close interaction with the desert ascetics. The people of Alexandria, furthermore, were famed for their volatile religious sentiments; it was a place where controversy thrived.¹⁴¹

The Alexandrian heritage suited well the conditions of persecution. The refugee patriarchs, bishops, priests, and ascetics that came together in Egypt's sanctuary of asylum found themselves in a situation that encouraged the spiritual momentum of their cause, combining fears of oppression with the recognition of Egypt's authoritative position among Christians.¹⁴² Thus the persecuted not only fled to Egypt for safety but looked to it to maintain their legitimacy. Egypt, as elsewhere in the East, had not represented a unanimous anti-Chalcedonian faith and had not long before provoked disciplinary measures from Severus;¹⁴³ but these differences were now put aside. Egypt, as befitted Cyril's homeland, be-

came the hallmark of orthodox communion for those professing Cyril's "Monophysite" faith.¹⁴⁴

To a large degree, practical reasons caused the division to harden along geographical and cultural lines. It was essential to the imperial ideology of Byzantium, as developed by Justinian, that the alliance with Rome be upheld and thus that the Latin elements of Chalcedonian theology be supported. It was also of import to the throne, again for ideological reasons, that the patriarchate rankings sanctioned at Chalcedon (Canon 28), giving Constantinople primacy over the eastern sees, be maintained. These two factors were crucial to the emperor's claim to be God's representative, the image of Christ on earth, and also to his claim that the empire was the Christian Empire, the image of the heavenly kingdom. The imperial policies that Justinian brought to the dispute demanded that Chalcedon be affirmed on a par with the three great councils before it, at Nicea, Constantinople, and Ephesus. Chalcedon gave divine sanction to the kind of authority Justinian was claiming and bequeathing to the Byzantine Empire.

On the other hand, the Roman West was of little interest or concern to the eastern provinces. It was remote geographically and culturally, and imperial investment in the West meant economic drain on the East, which had to finance the cost. Moreover, the eastern provinces were far enough away from Constantinople to escape the full brunt of its policies; furthermore, their languages and cultures were sufficiently autonomous to allow a separate activity. They were physically apart and possessed the cultural tools needed for remaining religiously distinct. Finally, their own suffering of calamities during the sixth century of necessity turned their interests inward to their own local situations. These factors made dissent easier, more deep seated, and more self-righteous.

For unforeseeable calamity interfered with Justinian's plans for a revitalized and Chalcedonian empire. A sequence of earthquakes, floods, and famine had nagged the empire from the turn of the sixth century, hitting the eastern provinces particularly hard. The situation came to a head in 542 when the Great Bubonic Plague broke out, bringing an incomprehensible level of disaster. Wherever it struck, production and business halted altogether for the duration of its presence. The survivors were left to restore "normality," while imperial demands continued unabated. But the plague recurred, in Justinian's reign four more times, and it deepened its toll on each occasion. When Evagrius Scholasticus wrote an account of this blight in his *Ecclesiastical History*, he stated with resignation that he wrote in the fifty-second year of the plague. The cu-

mulative effect on population, morale, and economy was as insidious as it was disastrous.¹⁴⁵

Even so, Justinian's military conquests over the course of his reign might have seemed impressive. But at his death in 565, little concrete gain for his efforts remained, apart from a crippled state. His failures were huge. The wars with Persia had continued, occurring intermittently for the duration of the reign, and their cost was threefold: campaigns had continually to be financed, and fortifications built and strengthened; efforts to end the animosities by diplomatic means involved huge tributary payments; and the opulence of the eastern cities was freely ransacked by the Persians. Moreover, in the West not one of the military victories was to be decisive for any length of time, and the gains proved more costly to hold than they had been to acquire; financially debilitating excursions were launched and relaunched for years. Finally, of least concern to Justinian but of considerable consequence to the empire, his various neighbors to the north required large tributary payments to stay indecisively under control.

Matters disintegrated rapidly on all fronts in the years following Justinian's death. The empire's resources had been drained; his tax collectors had been notoriously efficient. The eastern provinces, for example, already locked in their own plight, were crippled still more by the constant needs of the imperial treasury.¹⁴⁶ To be fair, the economic problems of the empire were already great when Justinian came to power; but he showed no acknowledgment of the delicate situation in his own policies, then or later.¹⁴⁷

Despite Justinian's lasting accomplishments, notably in art and in law, the glimpse of an empire regained did not conceal its own demise. So violent were the fluctuations between brilliance and obstinacy during Justinian's reign that they evoked an otherwise puzzling incongruity in the writings of his commentators. The apparently unaccountable, even self-defeating, opposite viewpoints in the writings of Procopius, or the complexities in the relationship between Justinian and John of Ephesus, make sense only insofar as they bear witness to the actual contemporary impact of Justinian's reign. Matters were not simply black or white; they were both at once, with no tinge of gray.¹⁴⁸

With this larger context as their backdrop, the accounts of Amida and its ascetics in John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints* provide considerable supplement to the chronicles of the sixth century. Lists of facts, events, and odd occurrences are translated by John's stories into cohesive parts of real and ongoing life in the eastern empire. Similarly, the people he follows through the wider empire establish for us a sensitivity

to the time and space of Justinian's era. Here matters were not just affected by imperial policies but actually take on the imprint of the imperial personalities themselves—not the remote king and queen perceived from Amida's territory, but Justinian and Theodora at work. Thus John opens for us the world in which he lived; it is to that opening we now turn.

· VII ·

JOHN OF EPHESUS: ASCETICISM AND SOCIETY

The playing out of the ascetic's role in which John and his subjects participated was not an innovative process. They bore witness to the authority of tradition; at the same time, they molded their inheritance to fit the immediacy of their own day. But, as in the case of women, the reaction was a pragmatic one. Flexibility and responsiveness were clearly at hand, but no evidence of deeper changes in the socioreligious structures can be found in John of Ephesus' *Lives*.

John writes hagiography as if writing a commentary on his times. But the *Lives* are very much a personal product, and we cannot generalize from John's perspective. Other hagiography of the same basic format, and overlapping chronologically with John's collection, presents a different story. Cyril of Scythopolis wrote his *Lives of Palestinian Saints* contemporaneously with John of Ephesus' work.¹ More formally biographical in style, Cyril's accounts are nonetheless written with straightforward simplicity and with methodical concern for historical detail. Almost two generations later, John Moschus wrote his *Pratum spirituale*, an informal collection of Eastern ascetic vignettes primarily set in Palestine.² These are told in a manner more anecdotal than that which John of Ephesus employs, but Moschus shares his eye for episodic portraiture. Though Moschus wrote later, many of his stories date back to the period covered by John of Ephesus and convey a coherent sense of the sixth century.

A comparison among these works at once evokes significant differences. The vitality in John of Ephesus' urban asceticism, the distant clarity of Cyril's monasteries, and the stillness of John Moschus' desert, seem to speak of altogether different worlds. But the eastern provinces of the empire faced a religious crisis in the midst of their worldly difficulties. These three collections each present a different view of the relationship between asceticism and society and between the temporal and spiritual worlds in this same situation. Some of their differences can be attributed to their provenance and religious standings: Cyril and John Moschus represented the Palestinian monastic tradition and had the political advantage of being of the Chalcedonian confession. But the differences between these texts do raise important issues, and in doing so they offer valuable insight as to what options were available to hagiographers in the face of such upheaval. Their differences represent not so much various ascetic responses but various interpretations of what asceticism meant for the respective authors.

CONTRASTS IN HAGIOGRAPHY

Cyril of Scythopolis, like John of Ephesus, wrote with a self-conscious sense of purpose. The times in which he lived marked him too, and the task he set himself—to honor the founders of Palestinian monasticism—was not easy. Cyril saw the events of the fifth and sixth centuries as religiously dangerous. But where John saw an essential unity in time and space between the physical and divine realms, Cyril saw a gap, bridged only by contact of a limited kind.

Cyril's *Lives* are well-crafted biographies, though he includes the standard apologia that his own skills are inadequate for the task.³ Yet despite his formality, he does not write heavily stylized hagiography. His language is clean and unadorned, carefully worked (unlike John Moschus') but unaffected.⁴ He follows his subjects from birth to death, and sometimes posthumously.⁵

Cyril writes with a fastidious attention to detail. He marks and countermarks every verifiable point: where his information came from and how he got it, locations, relationships, and, above all, dates. In fact, Cyril's preoccupation with dates is startling in literature of this kind. At frequent intervals he notes the date in various combinations from the year in secular reckoning, the age of his subject at the time, which year of which emperor's reign, and the major landmark events:⁶ imperial and patriarchate dealings and successions; occurrences of plague, famine,

drought, invasion; rebellion politically motivated (by the Samaritans) or religiously (by the Palestinian Origenists); and foundations and dedications of monasteries. He seems to offer us exactly what John of Ephesus does not provide, a welcome sense of order. But the contrast is deceptive and may in fact work the other way. John's carelessness is belied by the coherent discipline his subjects display. Cyril's narrative efforts, too, are belied by the content: the emphasis on historical setting appears an artificial imposition by the author and not a reflection of what these saints' lives intend.

Cyril limits himself to stories of leaders. It is here that we see his audience most clearly. He cuts himself off from the less glamorous activity John of Ephesus records. Cyril's saints are removed from the experiences of ordinary people, not only by their social class at birth but also and often by blood relations or high connections with the ecclesiastical and imperial hierarchies.⁷ The disciples who follow their examples and join their monasteries are also of similar background. As a whole, theirs is a superiority of place as well as of class: none are native to Palestine. As Cyril recounts events, the work of these men effectively raises Palestine to a stature befitting its identity as the Holy Land and its authority through Jerusalem's position as patriarchal seat, sufficient stature to match the monastic and ecclesiastical authority of Egypt and Alexandria, and of Syria and Antioch. Indeed, Cyril presents Jerusalem as the patriarchate most loyal to the imperial throne. Cyril is aiming for a high audience, seeking it as far away as Constantinople; he addresses a cosmopolitan and powerful elite, centered in the great cities and their networks of great families.⁸ John of Ephesus seeks only the audience of the East, a poorer and provincial lot.

The social advantages of Cyril's subjects find a spiritual correspondence in their elite place as holy men. Their ascetic practices and monastic work create a holy space that mirrors Paradise. Cyril's holy men are never wanting for food or water, whether lost in the desert or enduring widespread droughts or famine.⁹ They are divinely protected from every facet of sixth-century calamity, calamities threatening the holy no less than the ordinary in John of Ephesus' *Lives*. These saints need not fear danger from fire, wild beasts, robbers, pillaging troops, or plague.¹⁰ Indeed, their anchoritic solitude can last unbroken by any temporal care or contact for many, many years.¹¹

Removed by grace from the normal hardships of the world, Cyril's saints keep themselves apart from such experiences. In no case do they minister or serve unless forcefully beseeched.¹² Claiming their own sinfulness precludes them from the position of mediator, they provide in-

tercession only with reluctance whether to emperor or to God.¹³ For these holy ones, care for the needy is the business of the church in the world: institutions founded by wealthy patrons and run by the ecclesiastical hierarchy are of little concern to those of the desert.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, Cyril emphasizes the posthumous miracles of Saints Euthymius and Sabas, miracles entailing cures, exorcisms, rescues of various sorts, and interventions where heretical doings threaten¹⁵—the very kinds of activity that the world sought from the holy men while alive but that they evaded by their retreat to the desert.

The good works performed by these ascetics are hence shown to be of total disinterest to them. The world of the desert and the world of the city do not meet.¹⁶ For Cyril, the divine protection these men receive is the mark of their sanctity—Paradise regained—and their apparent lack of concern for the society beyond their monastic communities portrays their absolute devotion to God. In their sacred abode, they feel compunction if they unwittingly harm a mule,¹⁷ but their compassion for the larger world is not in evidence. Yet Cyril does highlight just how powerful these holy men are when they do turn to the affairs of the Christian society beyond their walls.

Thus the emphasis many scholars have placed on the imperial interventions of Saints Euthymius and Sabas must be seen in the hagiographical context that Cyril establishes for us.¹⁸ Euthymius was only persuaded with great difficulty to meet the empress Eudocia, although Simeon the Stylite himself had sent her; and he spurned her pleas for advice more than once despite her devoted efforts and building campaigns on behalf of the church.¹⁹ Again, one of Euthymius' posthumous miracles is instructive: during the reign of Zeno, the patriarch Martyrius of Jerusalem sent an envoy to Constantinople to plead for help in the religious turbulence rife in Palestine; but the saint appeared in a vision and forbade the journey altogether.²⁰

The work of Sabas was, however, of a different kind; and it is here that Cyril writes from within a set of calamitous circumstances that match the backdrop of John of Ephesus' *Lives*. In 511, Sabas was persuaded by Elias, then patriarch of Jerusalem, to meet with the emperor Anastasius regarding the severe disturbances within the church: the Acacian schism with Rome and the Monophysite struggles of the eastern patriarchates.²¹ The holy man was persuaded to make this journey because Elias pressed him hard about the perils to orthodoxy. While in Constantinople, Sabas admonished Anastasius about his Monophysite leanings and also requested fiscal reforms for Palestine, again at the patriarch's behest. Although he campaigned vigorously against Severus,

who was in Constantinople at the time, and thus incurred Anastasius' disfavor, his presence was sufficiently impressive for him to return to Palestine with imperial largesse for distribution among the monasteries.²² Later, Sabas himself took the initiative to approach Anastasius, this time by organizing and sending a petition of protest, signed by the bulk of the Palestinian ascetic community, against Severus' activities as patriarch of Antioch and the imperial support Severus enjoyed in these endeavors.²³

Some years later, Sabas was again besought to play envoy for Palestine. The province had suffered severe famine and drought for several years, narrowly avoiding a popular rebellion; shortly thereafter, the Samaritan revolt left the cities and countryside of Palestine in ruins. Sabas was approached by Peter, now patriarch of Jerusalem, and by the other leading Palestinian bishops and begged to go once more to Constantinople, this time to plead for leniency and tax remission on behalf of the battered province. In 531, the saint set off for Justinian's court.²⁴

Sabas' time in Justinian's care is described by Cyril as spectacular, and indeed it would seem to have accomplished spectacular results, both for Palestine and for the Chalcedonian church.²⁵ But Sabas had shown no more interest in or inclination for alleviating Palestine's suffering before this excursion than he had before his voyage to Anastasius' court. On both of these occasions, he acted because he was summoned to do so. The outrage that spurred Z'ura the Stylite and Mare the Solitary to march to the imperial presence and protest against imperial policies and the compassion that found the Amidan ascetics feeding and clothing the stricken populace of the east, although themselves in exile under hazardous conditions, are absent in Sabas' work and in the less histrionic actions of Euthymius. Cyril's concern to place his holy men firmly and accurately in their historical setting shows their disassociation from it.

However, Sabas did act on his own initiative on one occasion: the letter of protest to Anastasius about Severus of Antioch. The major issue for Cyril's saints is heresy, and their fear about it laces all of Cyril's accounts. The *Life of Euthymius* treats us to lengthy declarations of faith and angry responses to the charge that the Council of Chalcedon (which took place during the height of Euthymius' monastic reign) had blessed Nestorianism by a different name.²⁶

Indeed, Cyril's writings show that defense of Chalcedon was required as much in the sixth century as it was in the fifth.²⁷ However, Cyril's *Lives* dwell above all on the theological divisions that rent the Palestinian monastic community internally during the fifth and sixth cen-

turies, culminating in Cyril's own time with the crisis of Origenism.²⁸ The theological divisions within the desert are Cyril's overriding concern, above all else, and are the only form of crisis that move his holy men to action of their own doing: the real world is here.

For Cyril and for his subjects, the desert is the primary scene. It is where they live and where they work; their interest is not in what lies outside it. Only the battle against heresy can stir them to action in the temporal world, for heresy is an attack on the divine. The struggling eastern populace rouses no sense of urgency for these ascetics. John of Ephesus and his subjects also perceive religious crisis as the only important reality. But for them, the crisis of true faith is found in, and battled out in, the midst of society, the community of the Christian body. Although ascetics might choose solitude for part or all of their career, John does not present us with the attitude even from hermits that the human and divine are dichotomized arenas. Such a view is, however, precisely what Cyril leaves with us.

The paradoxes are apparent in Cyril's *Lives*, too, through his treatment of women. Cyril does not choose to include any female subjects among his select group of biographies, and indeed he makes no mention of the convents and women solitaries who were part of Palestine's desert community.²⁹ The antipathy of his subjects towards women is made plain; even a remote resemblance to women was dangerous. Euthymius and Sabas were both adamant that eunuchs and beardless youths must be kept separate from the primary monasteries and from the desert *lavrae* and *cenobiae*.³⁰ Sabas once punished severely a monk who had seen the eyes of a woman that the two had passed by: no more, but no less.³¹

Yet the few women mentioned in passing in Cyril's accounts are all shown to be virtuous;³² in fact, Cyril himself as well as some of his subjects are seen to have been encouraged and prepared for their monastic careers by pious women.³³ The extremes of shunning women as the source of destruction, and yet encountering women as positive models of faith, do not balance out; they resemble the extremes between Cyril's conscientious historical sense and his subjects' lack of orientation to time, place, or society. In the case of women, in this context of stressed enmity, there is a peculiar edge to the physical intimacy with which Sabas heals women, touching and anointing their bodies.³⁴ Cyril's intent in recalling these incidents is to show that his saint is truly not of this world; but he succeeds, too, in severing the human from the holy. Consider the contrast, for example, in John of Ephesus' holy woman Susan, who neither saw the face of nor showed her face to a man for more than

twenty-five years while yet living within and leading a mixed ascetic community. For her, the temporal and the holy are distinct but not unrelated realms.

For Cyril's saints, faith can be found in the temporal world, but the holy cannot be. The divine must be sought outside it. The ascetic's responsibility to the wider community of believers is fulfilled in the action of achieving a spiritual life, thereby offering a bridge between the imperfection of human society and the perfection of a life conforming to the will of God. Cyril's meticulous style, then, accurately reflects his subjects insofar as it matches the discipline of their lives in the desert.

The stylistic contrast between Cyril's formality and John Moschus' informality could hardly be greater. Cyril speaks to a sophisticated readership; Moschus looks to satisfy popular interests with favorite themes and diverting tales. The shared motifs and perspectives of the two collections are thus seen in sharp relief: one does not expect the two to tally so well.

However timeless the activity of his holy men, Cyril does set them in a historical framework. Moschus does not bother to do so, and the reader might often wonder when and where the stories take place. He too writes in a style befitting his content; spare and stark, his language easily conjures the uncluttered world he unfolds.³⁵ Here the Palestinian desert is remote in both place and time. The ascetics that Moschus brings to life are also remote. They can pass years, sometimes decades, without seeing or speaking with another soul;³⁶ they can lie dead for as long again, unchanged, until another anchorite or traveler accidentally stumbles across them.³⁷ They suffer often the demons of boredom and sexual desire and seem to return to towns or cities only when they have fallen from their vows and seek the debauchery of their fantasies.³⁸ In this black and white existence, miracles and prodigies are the norm, the Lord's favorite people plainly indicated, and the will of the divine equally explicit.

Moschus does include stories of worthy ascetics living in urban settings; but these tend to be bishops, or holy men on business, who remain as detached in their city as in the desert, though an occasional glimpse of social context emerges: the women who become prostitutes because they are starving,³⁹ and the citizens ruined by burdensome debts.⁴⁰ The ascetics themselves are untouched by the events of their time, events that penetrate the desert air only for didactic purposes. If plague strikes a village, one can seek out these holy men, whose prayers can save one's children and banish the epidemic.⁴¹ If a marauding barbarian attacks, the prayers of these men can cause the enemies to be swal-

lowed up by the earth or carried off to death by a giant bird; they can even cause the innocent person to be transported elsewhere.⁴² Nor is food a problem: for these men, bread multiplies itself.⁴³ Moreover, for Moschus, holy women are solely occupied with battling Satan over the issue of fornication, a restricted sphere of activity even for women.⁴⁴

Moschus' Chalcedonian faith is manifested by the same means as his ascetic vision. His orthodoxy is revealed in signs, dreams, and miracles. The gates of hell are opened to reveal what punishment awaits the heretic in the afterlife;⁴⁵ holy sacraments are consumed by lightning if defiled by Monophysite hands.⁴⁶ Divine apparitions prevent Monophysites from worshipping in the holy places of Jerusalem;⁴⁷ evil odors are emitted by Syrian Monophysite monks, however faultless their ascetic practice.⁴⁸ The question of faith is omnipresent but is forever played out in the intangible space between the temporal and divine worlds. Thus two stylites, one Chalcedonian and one Monophysite, bring their religious dispute to the test by exploring the miraculous qualities of their respective holy sacraments—the Monophysite morsel, not surprisingly, proving unable to survive the trial.⁴⁹

Moschus presents in concrete terms the themes that underlie Cyril's seemingly less credulous biographies.⁵⁰ The similarity in perspective between them is more than a case of shared hagiographical motifs. The shared themes blend with the nature of the ascetic activity portrayed to reveal a common religious perception between the two works, despite their very different literary modes.

To be sure, there may be practical considerations affecting their lack of attention to the larger Christian community. Palestine did not suffer as intensely as Mesopotamia during the calamities that swept the sixth-century Byzantine East. Famine and plague do not appear to have been so long-lasting or debilitating when they occurred; natural disasters may not have been so frequent; warfare and marauding Saracens were not as persistent or as extensively destructive as such activity in Syria and Mesopotamia.⁵¹ The Samaritan revolt inflicted severe damage, but Justinian paid a generous largesse to the province soon afterwards, in recompense.⁵² Furthermore, the battle for orthodoxy was on a different footing for these two writers than for John of Ephesus. Origenism and Monophysites were real and present dangers for Cyril and Moschus, but their Chalcedonian faith nonetheless stood in a dominant position.

Yet the differences in misfortune are a matter of degree. Palestine was affected by the general malaise in the Byzantine East, and it did suffer accordingly. So Cyril's *Lives* and Moschus' anecdotes are not temporally divorced because their subjects were sheltered from overriding

conditions, which, as can be glimpsed in their stories, they did in fact occasionally encounter. Their focus is other-worldly not by luxury of circumstance but by conscious intent. Theirs is a majestic vision of ascetic devotion to God, unbounded by time or place. But both works also admit that this grandeur was tarnished by human weakness: whether the seduction of the spirit by the flesh, or the erosion caused by petty disputes, or the insidious harm of ambitions worked out through the excuse of doctrinal conflict. Moving out of the temporal world into that of the spiritual life did not necessarily bring one closer to God. It did, however, alter the nature of religious crisis and of holy presence.

By contrast, the *Lives* of John of Ephesus jolt the reader into an awareness of their setting. Cyril's precision and Moschus' simplicity are consonant with their detachment from surrounding events. But if one looks for stylistic pointers, then John's writing also reveals much about his subjects, even if not as he intended. John's muddled style is not inappropriate for his content. The reality of his times is apparent throughout the *Lives*. As we have seen, the people his ascetics seek out and care for time and again are the victims of what befell the East. The immediacy of his portrait of human experience, and of holy presence within it, is heightened by the shared suffering he depicts: his ascetics may serve by divine grace, but grace does not protect them. John might have wished to present his subjects in a dignified manner—hence his pomposity in style—but his narrative style provides the best mirror for his context: there is no consistency, no clarity, and no escape.

The points where John seems to dovetail with Cyril and Moschus in hagiographical presentation are the very places that reveal their disparity of outlook. John's Thomas the Armenian forsook the luxury of his inheritance because he recognized that material goods were an ephemeral blessing. But his cry that "all is vanity" was not made with the derision of a cynic; he knew his father's wealth had been amassed by oppression of the poor.⁵³ John and his subjects recognized that life in the temporal world could not be dismissed as worthless or illusory; the world of human life belonged to God. A vow of devotion to God was a vow to care for what was His.

John describes the fervor with which Thomas took up his new career: "His soul became drunk on God."⁵⁴ He also tells us what that meant: "He devoted himself to making gifts on a large scale to the needy and the distressed, and to those who had creditors, and to churches and monasteries."⁵⁵ Further, Thomas kept enough of his wealth to establish a large monastic community, from which he provided spiritual leadership. When persecution struck, he carried on in exile as before. Thomas

exemplifies John's choice of subject, although his career appears to begin in the well-worn formula of renouncing the temporal world for the spiritual.

Nor did John harbor illusions about his saints. He worried about Thomas' lack of care for the black ulcers on his legs,⁵⁶ just as he worried about the holy woman Euphemia's diseased feet.⁵⁷ His fear was that such negligence would result in the wearing out of the ascetic's ability to serve. He describes with clinical detail the grievous results when the monk Aaron left a gangrenous sore unattended on his body.⁵⁸ But John further relates the skill and ingenuity with which the doctors handled the case, once Aaron's condition had been discovered. His respect for the medical profession, an uncommon attitude among devout Christians,⁵⁹ was pragmatic: Aaron lived and labored another eighteen years after "the testing of this trial." But although he states the medical facts of the case, John still perceives the miraculous element of God's hand at work. Human effort in no way excludes divine agency.

In one of John's more hagiographically formulaic passages, he gives his sole report of a posthumous miracle: Paul the Anchorite, who had exorcised ferocious demons, continued to prove powerful after he died. John writes,

even after his death miracles were everywhere wrought through his holy bones, men taking his skull and going around the districts, and, wheresoever locusts came or hail, or a scorching wind, or bubonic plague, and his right hand or head went, God would straightway make deliverance.⁶⁰

The report is noteworthy because it stands alone in John's accounts. But in the context of the *Lives* as a whole, it makes sense. The populace of John's day required spiritual comfort as much as physical succor. Fear could gnaw no less than hunger, and it did gnaw. The relics of a holy man like Paul satisfied this need by providing the promise of care from the company of saints, not a small gift under the circumstances.

So, too, John tells of an incident occurring when the Amidan ascetic communities were in exile.⁶¹ During the widespread famines, these monks provided what food they could for those who came in need to their place of shelter. But one day, such a crowd pressed upon them that their supplies nearly ran out. The monks did not hesitate to draw out some of their own reserve, but finally they approached the elders saying, "The food of the brotherhood has reached the point of exhaustion, and there are still many strangers lying at the door, and we have no means of supplying the need of these and of the brotherhood." The elders responded at once,

Glory to our Lord! Go, our sons, and bring forth and relieve the poor and the strangers; and, if anything remains for ourselves, well, and if not, we will keep fasting vigil today, and let the needs of the strangers and the poor and the needy only be supplied; and let them not be cut short by us.⁶²

When the monks gathered for their meal at the day's end, they discovered food in abundance still remaining for themselves. "And the whole brotherhood stood on the tables themselves together with all the old heads of the convents, and they cried 'Kyrie eleeson' with great awe many times, with many tears."⁶³ The contrast to the similar stories, on the theme of a miraculous multiplication of food, told by Cyril and John Moschus is stark. John's ascetics knew hunger firsthand.

What is most apparent in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* is that the fundamental ascetic ideal—the basic understanding of devotion to God—and the response to crisis are identical. Neither offers a means of retreat or of refuge from the plight of the eastern provinces. As we have seen, the conditions of exile rendered the Amidan ascetics easy prey for hunger and plague; and their religious status did not exempt them from the massacres wrought by plundering foreign troops. Again, they could survive only so much Chalcedonian torture. In fact, these stories are notable for the standard hagiographical fare they do *not* include: the ascetic nagged by boredom or distracted by lust. Indeed, these sins are the product of too little activity and too much isolation. More pointedly, John presents no miracles for answers. These ascetics may cure the sick and exorcise demons and attend to those in need, but they cannot call forth divine intervention. They can only serve.

Such different understandings of the task of devotion are not necessarily contradictory. John of Ephesus and Cyril of Scythopolis could both record an incident they saw as miraculously performed by their saints. If one tells us only of the physical, human details, and the other only of the occurrence of the miracle itself, it is not because what happened in each case was different but simply because each writer had his own idea of which details were important.

John Moschus portrays in clear and even tones what Cyril declares in a more stately manner: an asceticism of impenetrable timelessness, in which the temporal world is a place to be shunned, while one's faith is played out between oneself and one's God. This too, for these two hagiographers, is the nature and arena of religious crisis, warfare on behalf of the divine in a space far removed from the irrelevance of human time and place.

But John of Ephesus tells us that there were times when the ascetics of the early Byzantine Empire held themselves accountable for the con-

dition of the temporal world, not because a beleaguered population sought them out but because they perceived themselves as inextricably bound to the temporal world. These saints of the eastern Byzantine frontier found only one answer to the calamity of their time and to the urgency of religious crisis: for them, the holy is found not outside human society but rather manifestly within it.

While we have seen concrete hagiographical contrasts in our texts, it is difficult to assess these contrasts in terms of theological significance. Modern scholarship on the Christological controversy has shown how complex the issues were, and how difficult it is to distinguish belief from perception of belief. On the surface, these texts seem to point toward genuine contrasts among the authors, both in how the hagiographers presented the relationship between asceticism and society and in what holy men and women actually did. Although one could not prove these contrasts to be theologically based, these sources do confront us with actual differences in hagiography and asceticism, differences pointing toward distinctions of culture and belief.

HAGIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

What, then, can we say about John of Ephesus as a hagiographer and as a historian?

John's faith and vocation were born of tradition, and so of a resolute stance against change; creativity is not a concern for John. Yet the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* are not a "literary" piece, determined by set hagiographic formulae or motifs; nor are they a collection molded into a predetermined format. John writes with a spontaneity that mirrors what he describes: an instinctive response to, and embracing of, whatever is encountered in God's world. He employs familiar language, and familiar phrases and themes, in order to place his biographies in their chosen context—that of hagiography—and in order to explain actions, beliefs, and events in a particular perspective. He is an interpreter as much as a reporter. His readers are guided through the *Lives* with signposts; they are being presented with a special view of history, a special kind of story. Language and imagery common to saints' lives orient John's audience to his purpose. But he employs these devices in a work otherwise highly personalized; they do not undermine the vitality of his collection.

Again, even John's fervor cannot obscure the soundness of his grounding in real history. John writes of lived experience. He is hasty on dates and locations and can mingle events in a confusing manner. He is insensitive to what falls outside his own interests, whether it be the fate

of a Jewish community, the livelihood of a remote village, or the consequences of altering forms of leadership for the Monophysite congregation. But he is true to his concern for what happened in people's lives and to their lives. His portraits of provincial life in Amida no less than his depictions of Constantinople are thus valuable to us, especially when complemented with the impressions given by other sources, whether contrasting or like-minded. We have here a measure of something that stands beside the historicity of records: a rare glimpse of the living itself.

The literary conventions of hagiography are often used in such a way as to hide the human qualities of their subjects and to disguise the objective nature of the occurrences they record beneath layers of interpretations. Hagiography is a retelling of a biography or legend through a different language; it looks through a different lens. So, too, did historiography in the ancient world dictate guidelines for the historian through a preponderant emphasis on events and divine intervention, on key leaders and celebrities, and on things produced or destroyed—buildings, laws, policies, councils, wars—all set against an established framework from the past. The orientation points of historiography were the political and religious structures that determined the responses to events or circumstances. Neither mode of description left much space for people as private individuals, or for the ordinary fare of day-to-day life apart from the exceptional: these were not their concerns.

John of Ephesus makes use of the hagiographer's method of describing persons blessed with the capacity to reveal holy presence in the workings of the world; and he uses the historian's framework of time, event, and situation laid out in a progressive scale to couch the *Lives* he records. But his accounts are in the end the product of his wish to write something of what he has seen. There is respect as much as reverence in these saints' *Lives*. His approach thus differs from that of historical chroniclers, yet his understanding of the holy and of the human causes him to leave aside much that adorns the hagiographer's usual product, whether formal or informal. So John's collection is an offering motivated by faith and steeped in his Monophysite spirituality. The perceptions that underlie it presuppose such a starting point. John begins in faith; the *Lives* are his affirmation of what religious belief means.

In his preface to the *Lives*, John states that his reason for writing this work was the duty imposed by Scripture: to glorify God by proclaiming the works of His grace in the world through the triumphs of His holy disciples. In the process of fulfilling this obligation, John is able to reveal to us a rich segment of sixth-century Byzantine experience. He can do this because he makes a simple equation between religion and life.

ABBREVIATIONS

For dictionaries, encyclopedias, and collections, full details may be found in the Bibliography.

AER	<i>American Ecclesiastical Review</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AMS	<i>Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum</i>
Anal. Boll.	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>Annales: e.s.c.</i>	<i>Annales: économies, sociétés, et civilisations</i>
BEO	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , 3d ed., edited by F. Halkin; and idem, <i>Novum Auctarium BHG</i>
BHO	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis</i> , edited by P. Peeters
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syrii</i> (unless otherwise noted)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
CSL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum</i>
DHGE	<i>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques</i>

DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
DR	<i>Downside Review</i>
DTC	<i>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique</i>
ECR	<i>Eastern Churches Review</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
GCS	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HE	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JME	<i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
NT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
OLP	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PETSE	<i>Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , edited by J. P. Migne
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
POC	<i>Proche-Orient Chrétien</i>
RBK	<i>Reallexicon zur Byzantinischen Kunst</i>
RE	<i>Paulys Realenzyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
REJ	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
RHE	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
ROC	<i>Revue de l'orient chrétien</i>
SCH	<i>Studies in Church History</i> , edited by D. Baker, G. J. Cuming, S. Mews, et alii
SLNPNF	<i>Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>

SSTS	Studies Supplementary to Sobornost
Sub. Hag.	Subsidia Hagiographica
TU	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>
ZK	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>

Note on primary sources: For individual saints' lives not in major collections (e.g., John of Ephesus, *Lives*), see under *Vita* _____.

NOTES

Introduction. John's World

1. See, for example, Brock, "Introduction to Syriac Studies," esp. 11–13; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 4; and Segal, *Edessa*, 16. See n. 3 below.

2. On Syriac's independent usage in the late Roman Empire, cf. Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 2: 865, 924, 968–69, 991, 994, 996. Herein, "Syriac" refers to a Syriac-speaking group or context only. "Syrian" refers to culture in the region of the Syrian Orient (languages spoken there varied: Syriac, Greek, Aramaic).

3. Wright, *Short History of Syriac Literature*; Duval, *Littérature syriaque*; Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*.

4. Macuch, *Geschichte*.

5. So Duval, *Littérature syriaque*, 7–15. Edessa's claim to primacy in this respect is based on the legendary correspondence between its king Abgar the Black and Jesus, during his ministry. The legend is most fully recorded in the fifth-century *Doctrine of Addai*, ed. and trans. G. Phillips; it first became famous when the correspondence was translated into Greek by Eusebius of Caesarea, *HE* 1.13. See esp. Segal, *Edessa*, 62–81.

6. See, for example, Cameron and Cameron, "Christianity and Tradition"; Cameron, "Corippus' Poem"; Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*; M. L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Ithaca, 1951); Momigliano, *Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity*; and idem, "Popular Religious Beliefs."

7. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*; Segal, *Edessa*, 1–61.

8. Drijvers, "Facts and Problems"; Segal, *Edessa*, 30–61, esp. 30–31. The *Odes of Solomon*, *Acts of Judas Thomas*, and *Didascalia Apostolorum* are examples of texts from the Syrian Orient circulating in both Syriac and Greek. On the *Odes of*

Solomon, see subsequent discussion. See also A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Supplements to NT 5 (Leiden, 1962); R. H. Connolly, *The Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford, 1929); A. Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, CSCO 401/175, 402/176, 407/179, 408/180 (Louvain, 1979).

9. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*; idem; *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*; idem, "Facts and Problems"; Griffith, "Ephraem". Ephrem's comment on "the poison of the wisdom of the Greeks" is from the Hymns on Faith, 2.24.

10. On the Christianization of the Syrian Orient, see esp. Segal, *Edessa*; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 4–24; and Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, 175–96, esp. 194–96. On the early resistance to Hellenic influence, see Brock, "Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels"; and idem, "From Antagonism to Assimilation." Both Segal and Murray provide ample testimony to the creativity and autonomous inspiration of early Syriac literature.

11. For the impact of Eastern and Western influences on the Syrian Orient, see esp. Segal, *Edessa*; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*; and Peeters, *Orient et Byzance*.

12. Peeters, *Orient et Byzance*; MacMullen, "Provincial Languages." Cf. Ebied, "Syriac Influence".

13. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis*; Segal, *Edessa*, 87, 93, 95, 108, 116, 150–51, 166, 185.

14. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation"; idem, "Aspects of Translation"; and idem, "Some Aspects of Greek Words."

15. Brock, "Aspects of Translation"; idem, "Greek into Syriac"; idem, "Towards a History"; P. Peeters, "Traductions et traducteurs dans l'hagiographie orientale à l'époque byzantine," *Anal. Boll.* 40 (1922): 241–98 (= *Orient et Byzance*, 165–218).

16. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*; idem, "Theory of Symbolism"; Brock, *Luminous Eye*; Ephrem, *Harp of the Spirit*; Brock, "Syriac and Greek Hymnography."

17. Brock, "Greek into Syriac." For the place of Syrian prayer tradition in the larger context of Christian mysticism, see, above all, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer*, trans. S. P. Brock; Brock, "Prayer of the Heart"; and Widengren, "Researches in Syrian Mysticism." Ephrem Syrus, John the Solitary, and Isaac of Nineveh are prominent examples of Syriac writers still read today by various Orthodox and Roman Catholic monastic communities. See the excellent and sensitive discussion and translations by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery [D. Miller] in Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*.

18. The entire topic is well handled in Peeters, *Orient et Byzance*. Specific instances are treated in commentaries by Amiaud in *Vita Alexii*, *Légende syriaque*, Burkitt in *Euphemia and the Goth*, and in *Vita Pelagiae*, *Pélagie la pénitente*, ed. P. Petitmengin.

19. An example, in the case of Pelagia, is the transvestite saint motif. See Delehay, *Legends of the Saints*, 150–55; Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite*, 84–102; and Patlagean, "Histoire de la femme déguisée."

20. For the disputes leading up to, and then resulting from, the Council of Chalcedon in 451, see, for example, Grillmeier and Bacht, *Konzil von Chalkedon*; and Sellers, *Council of Chalcedon*. On the popular involvement, see Gregory, *Vox Populi*; and Frend, "Popular Religion." These issues are further explored in subsequent discussion here.

21. Brock, "Aspects of Translation"; idem, "Some Aspects of Greek Words."

22. *Syriac Fathers on Prayer*; cf. Brock, "Christology of the Church."

23. See Lebon, *Monophysisme Sévérien*; idem, "Christologie du monophysisme syrien"; and Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*. Although Severus probably knew Syriac, he wrote only in Greek. However, his writings survive almost solely in translation, the bulk being in Syriac. The Syriac translations of his works were undertaken in the sixth and seventh centuries, with major revisions in the eighth. See Graffin, "Jacques d'Edesse réviseur"; and Severus of Antioch, *Sixth Book of Select Letters*, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks.

24. In fact, Syriac provided the bridge between Greek and Arabic culture during the Middle Ages: it was through Syriac that Greek learning (notably the work of Aristotle) was translated into Arabic. See Brock, "Aspects of Translation"; idem, "Greek into Syriac"; and Ebied, "Syriac Influence."

25. Bundy, "Criteria for Being in communione."

26. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:86–97.

27. Ibid., 89–96 and passim. See now the insightful discussion in Brown, *Body and Society*, 83–102; and Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites." The possible exceptions are Bardaisan and the group known as the Quqites; Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*; idem, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*.

28. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 4–24; Segal, *Edessa*, 67–69.

29. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism"; and Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*; both explore this aspect of Syrian spirituality in literature. Such an understanding of theological symbolism can be seen, for example, in the poetry of Ephrem Syrus. See, above all, Brock, *Luminous Eye*; idem, "Poet as Theologian"; and Murray, "Theory of Symbolism." Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, considers Syrian spirituality and its symbolism through a variety of themes.

30. Cf. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism"; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:39–45; Brown, *Body and Society*, 83–102.

31. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 131–42; see, for example, *Odes of Solomon* 38.9–12 and 42.8–9. On the *Odes of Solomon*, see n. 46 below.

32. Esp. Matt. 22:1–14 and 25:1–13. Cf. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 5–6; idem, *Holy Spirit*, 51–52. For an especially sensitive reading of the meaning of this image for the Syrian Orient, see Brown, *Body and Society*, 83–102, 323–38.

33. Vööbus, *Celibacy*; idem, *History of Asceticism* 1:90–96; Murray, "Exhortation to Candidates."

34. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:68–83.

35. Ibid., 103–106; Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 6; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 12–17.

36. Gribomont, "Monachisme au sein de l'église"; Nedungatt, "Covenanters," 191–215, 419–44; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:97–103, 184–208; idem,

"Institution of the *Benai Qeïama*." Primary texts on the *bnay* and *bnath qyāmā* are as follows: Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes* 6, ed. and trans. D. I. Parisot; and the canons in *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, ed. and trans. A. Vööbus, esp. 34–50, 122, 125–26.

37. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 239–76; Brock, *Holy Spirit*, 49–52.

38. For example, Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:90.

39. For example, 1 Cor. 15:45–49.

40. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism"; cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:152–53.

41. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:69; Bundy, "Criteria for Being in communion."

42. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 12–16; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1; Guillaumont, "Monachisme et éthique judéo-chrétienne"; Judge, "Earliest Use of Monachos"; Kretschmar, "Beitrag zur Frage"; Beck, "Beitrag zur Terminologie."

43. Nowhere is this clearer than in Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*.

44. See esp. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1. For the various religious models, see Brown, *Body and Society*, esp. 83–102, 323–38; Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*; Hoffmann, *Marcion*; Fiey, "Marcionites"; Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites"; Gribomont, "Monachisme au sein de l'église"; Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*; idem, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism*; and Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*.

45. On the autonomous origins of Syrian asceticism, see Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*; Gribomont, "Monachisme au sein de l'église"; and Jargy, "Origines du monachisme." The Syrians themselves lost sight of the origins of their asceticism under the impact of Egypt's fame and eventually claimed that the ascetic roots in Syria and Mesopotamia stemmed from disciples of Pachomius. See Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism"; and Fiey, "Aonès, Awun, et Awgin." A clear example of the loss can be seen in Thomas of Marga, *Historia monastica*, in *Book of Governors*, ed. and trans. E. A. Wallis Budge.

46. *Odes of Solomon*, ed. and trans. J. H. Charlesworth, 2nd ed. (Missoula, 1977; Chico, 1982).

47. On the original language of the *Odes*, see the judicious comments by Murray, "Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity," 5. For a first-century dating see Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon"; and Charlesworth and Culpepper, "Odes of Solomon and Gospel of John." The second-century position is bolstered by McNeil, "Odes of Solomon and Scriptures." Drijvers has been forcefully arguing for the third century, see his *East of Antioch*, chapters 6–10. The debates over the *Odes* have been fought long and hard, and the literature is extensive. See now the detailed annotated bibliography in Lattke, *Oden Salomos*, vol. 3.

48. Celibacy is assumed throughout, as, for example, in Odes 23 and 33. Betrothal to Christ is its explicit meaning, as, for example, in Ode 42. In Ode 38, false doctrine is described as the "Bridegroom who corrupts," with false bridal feast and celebration.

49. For example, Ode 6.1–2.
50. Ode 40.2–4.
51. For example, Ode 21.6–9. Cf. Aune, *Cultic Setting*, esp. 12–16, 166–94.
52. Ode 35.7; 37.1–4; 42.1–2.
53. B. McNeil, “*Odes of Solomon and Suffering of Christ*.”
54. See “Martyr at the Sasanid Court,” ed. and trans. S. P. Brock; Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire*, 85–99.
55. BHO, 363–68; BHG, 731–40. I follow the texts in *Euphemia and the Goth*, ed. and trans. F. C. Burkitt. On the texts and their historicity, see idem, *Euphemia and the Goth*, 5–44; and Segal, *Edessa*, 83–86.
56. For the texts of the *Doctrina Addai*, see n. 5 above. On the historicity, see Segal, *Edessa*, 76–81; and Drijvers, “Facts and Problems.”
57. Sharbil and Babai, BHO, 1049–51; Barsamya, BHO, 150–51. The texts are edited by P. Bedjan in AMS 1.95–130. On the later dating of these texts and their possible composition in Greek, see Segal, *Edessa*, 82–83, and commentary by Burkitt, in *Euphemia and the Goth*, 5–28.
58. Bundy, “Criteria for Being in *communione*.”
59. Cf. Segal, *Edessa*, 82–86; and commentary by Burkitt in *Euphemia and the Goth*, 5–44.
60. Barnes, “Constantine and the Christians”; Brock, “Christians in the Sasanian Empire.”
61. *Vita Antonii*, sec. 46–47. See the discussion in S. A. Harvey, “The Edessan Martyrs and Ascetic Tradition,” *Symposium Syriacum 1988* (Forthcoming).
62. See n. 55 above. *The Martyrdom of Shmona and Guria* is in *Euphemia and the Goth*, ed. and trans. F. C. Burkitt, 90–110.
63. *Ibid.*, 8.
64. *Ibid.*, 14.
65. *Ibid.*, 49.
66. *Ibid.*, 37–38, 47.
67. Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine* 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13; HE 8.9.
68. For example, *The Martyrs of Lyons*, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. H. Musurillo (Oxford, 1979), 62–85; *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, *Acts of Christian Martyrs*, 106–31; Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine* 9.
69. *The Martyrdom of Habib*, in *Euphemia and the Goth*, ed. and trans. F. C. Burkitt, 112–28; and also in *Ancient Syriac Documents*, ed. and trans. W. Cureton, (trans.) 72–85.
70. *Ibid.*, 30.
71. Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine*; idem, HE 8; *Vita Antonii*.
72. *Martyrdom of Habib*, in *Euphemia and the Goth*, 30.
73. Cf. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on Habib the Martyr*, in *Ancient Syriac Documents*, ed. and trans. W. Cureton, 86–96.
74. *Acts of Sharbil*, in *Ancient Syriac Documents*, ed. and trans. W. Cureton, 41–62. On the date and languages, see n. 57 above.
75. Especially Aphrahat, *Demonstration 1*, “On Faith”, and *Demonstration*

6, "On the Bnay Qyama," in Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes*, ed. and trans. D. I. Parisot, cols. 5–46, 239–312; and "Aphrahat the Persian Sage," trans. J. G. Gwynn, 345–52, 362–75. See also Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*.

76. Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 18, "On Virginity," in Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes*, ed. and trans. D. I. Parisot, cols. 817–44; also Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, 76–83.

77. Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6, "On the Bnay Qyama," and *Demonstration* 7, "On Penitence," in Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes*, ed. and trans. D. I. Parisot, cols. 5–46, 239–312, 313–60.

78. *Ibid.*, *Demonstration* 6; Murray, "Exhortation to Candidates"; Black, "Tradition of Hasidaean-Essene"; Aune, *Cultic Setting*.

79. Ephrem, *Hymnen de fide*, 14.5, ed. and trans. E. Beck, in CSCO 154/73, 62.

80. Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena*, 50.7, ed. and trans. E. Beck, in CSCO 240/102, 69.

81. *Ibid.*, 69.3–5, 14; here trans. S. P. Brock in Ephrem, *Harp of the Spirit*, 77–79.

82. Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena*, 50.3; here trans. S. P. Brock, *Harp of the Spirit*, 56.

83. These texts are discussed in Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:152–54, and he attributes both to Ephrem. But the doubts on Ephrem's authorship are well stated in Gribomont, "Monachisme au sein de l'église." However, Theodoret of Cyrrihus, *Historia religiosa* 1–6, indicates that such ascetic practice was pursued in the Syrian Orient during Ephrem's lifetime.

84. Ephrem, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius," ed. and trans. S. P. Brock, 286.

85. See esp. Brown, *Body and Society*, 323–38; and Guillaumont, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien*, 215–39. An example of Ephrem's view on the unity of body and soul can be seen in his Verse Homily I, in *Syrers sermones* 1, ed. and trans. E. Beck, esp. 11.260–79. In this passage, Ephrem describes the way in which the body reveals the soul's condition. A similar passage occurs in the *Vita Antonii*, sec. 67. But in the passage on Antony, the saint has achieved this state of harmony between body and soul through the discipline of his ascetic practice, by which he has "subjugated" his body to his soul's desire (sec. 14). For Ephrem, the one reveals the other because they are ultimately inseparable.

86. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 1–2, is our primary source, along with the hymns of Ephrem: on Jacob in the *Carmina Nisibena*, 13–14; and the cycle on Julian Saba, of disputed authorship but certainly from the same period, (Ephrem Syrus?), *Hymnen auf Abraham Kidunaya und Julianos Saba*, ed. and trans. E. Beck. The poems on Abraham Qidunaya are another important witness to earliest Syrian asceticism. See further Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:141–46, and 2:42–51. On Julian, see also Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 42; and Sozomen, *HE* 3.14.

87. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 1.

88. *Ibid.*, 2.

89. *Ibid.*, 2.18.

90. Ibid., 1.11, 2.6.

91. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 40. In the *Carmina Nisibena* 56.10, Ephrem calls himself ‘*allānā*, a word that can refer to a variety of pastoral positions; this is our only reference to an actual title for Ephrem’s position. See the excellent discussion of Ephrem’s career in Griffith, “Ephraem.”

92. See Brown, “Saint as Exemplar”; and for how this was made possible, idem, *Body and Society*.

93. Brown, “Rise and Function.” The economic monopoly that Syrian monasteries exerted over villages continued under the Arabs; the case of Simeon of the Olives (d. 734) and the Tur Abdin dramatically illustrates the issue. See “Fenqitho of the Monastery,” ed. and trans. S. P. Brock, 174–79.

94. For example, Brown, “Rise and Function”; idem, “Saint as Exemplar”; idem, “Dark Age Crisis”; Frend, “Monks and the Survival”; Frazee, “Late Roman and Byzantine Legislation.”

95. *Vita Antonii*, sec. 69–70. Cf. Chitty, *Desert a City*; Brown, *Body and Society*, 213–40.

96. Guillaumont, “Conception de désert” (= *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien*, 67–88).

97. On Basil’s monastic aspirations, see Basil, *Lettres* 2, 223, and 142–44; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Lettres* 6; *Oration* 43.63; Sozomen, *HE* 6.34. For the intrigues involving Gregory of Nazianzus, see Basil, *Lettres* 14, and Gregory of Nazianzus, *Lettres* 2, 40, 46, 48–50, 59.

98. For example, Socrates, *HE* 7.7.13–15.

99. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*. Cf. Jargy, “Premiers instituts monastiques”; Hendriks, “Vie quotidienne.” See chapter 3 for specific discussion of how this precarious position affected Mesopotamia.

100. Simeon Stylites the Elder: BHG, 1678–88; BHO, 1121–26. The major documents on Simeon were collected and discussed in *Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, ed. H. Leitzmann; see *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, trans. R. Doran. On Simeon, see Drijvers, “Spätantike Parallelen”; and Harvey, “Sense of a Stylite.”

101. On the physical details of stylitism, see *Saints stylites*, ed. and trans. H. Delehaye, and Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 2:208–23.

102. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 26. Relevant to the discussion here are the treatments in Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*; and Peeters, “Un saint hellénisé par annexion: Syméon Stylite,” in *Orient et Byzance*, 93–136.

103. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 26.12.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid., 26.2, 7, 12. See the discussions in A.-J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne. Libanius, Chrysostome, et les moines de Syrie* (Paris, 1959), 354–57; and Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*, 76–77.

106. The Syriac *vita* survives in two recensions. The earlier (A), Vat. Syr. 117, was copied in A.D. 473: *Acta sanctorum martyrum orientalium*, ed. and trans. J. S. Assemani; there is an English translation in Doran (see n. 100 above). The later (B), Brit. Mus. Add. 14484, dates to early in the sixth century: *Vita Simeonis*

Stylitae, in *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, ed. P. Bedjan (hereafter AMS); there is a German translation by H. Hilgenfeld in *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, ed. H. Lietzmann, 80–192; and an English one by F. Lent, "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites."

107. AMS 4.620, 519.

108. *Ibid.*, 612.

109. For example, *ibid.*, 571–72, 574.

110. *Ibid.*, 572, 623.

111. Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite."

112. The Greek *vita* by Antonius has been edited by H. Lietzmann, *Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, 19–78; there is a French translation of the primary Greek text by A.-J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne*, 493–506, and (for sec. 28–33) 373–75.

113. As opposed to Nöldeke and others, for example, "Yet it must always be remembered that in all Christendom, Egypt apart, it will be difficult to find such an insane and soul-destroying asceticism as was practised by the purely Semitic Syrians from about the fourth to the seventh centuries" (Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*, 10).

114. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques*, 1:227–76; Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Stylites syriens*; Nasrallah, "Survie de Saint Siméon"; Vikan, "Art, Medicine and Magic."

115. *Saints Stylites*, ed. and trans. H. Delehay; Delehay, "Femmes stylites"; Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Stylites syriens*.

116. Alexius the Man of God, *BHO*, 36–44. The primary Syriac text is in *Légende syriaque*, ed. A. Amiaud. See also Drijvers, "Légende des heiligen Alexius."

117. *Vita Alexii, Légende syriaque*, ed. A. Amiaud, 10 (trans. 6).

118. *Ibid.*, 12 (trans. 8).

119. On Rabbula, see Blum, *Rabbula von Edessa*. There is an important Syriac *vita* in AMS 4:396–450.

120. The story of the Man of God was translated into most Christian languages of the Middle Ages; see the discussion in *Vita Alexii*, ed. A. Amiaud. Eventually the saint acquired a name, Alexius, and all of the standard traits missing in the fifth century *vita* (miracles, teachings, a body venerated at public feast days, a tomb transformed into an opulent shrine, and the adoration of both the pope and the emperors). An example of this later version can be found in C. J. Odenkirchen, *The Life of St. Alexius in the Old French Version of the Hildesheim Manuscript* (Brookline, 1978).

121. So, too, in the case of Daniel the Stylite and Simeon Stylites the Younger. See also the excellent discussion in *Theodoret of Cyrrhus, History*, trans. R. M. Price, ix–xxxvii.

122. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 26.23.

123. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 2:181–82; *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, ed. and trans. A. Vööbus, 24–33, and compare *passim*.

124. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 2:275.

125. On this point only I disagree with Drijvers, "Legende des heiligen Alexius."

126. The Syriac-speaking church in Persia followed a different course. See Labourt, *Christianisme dans l'empire perse*; Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire*; and Brock, "Christology of the Church."

127. See Grillmeier and Bacht, *Konzil von Chalkedon*; Sellers, *Council of Chalcedon*; Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, chapter 5; and Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*.

128. See Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 770–73; and Sellers, *Council of Chalcedon*. It is certainly Leo's *Tome* that receives the most scathing opprobrium in Syriac sources. Cf. Mouterde, "Concile de Chalcédoine." Cf. Lebon, *Monophysisme Sévérien*, esp. 1–82.

129. For the background of the problem of religious language, see Young, "God of the Greeks."

130. See Wigram, *Separation of the Monophysites*; and Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*.

131. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies*; idem, *Council of Chalcedon*; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*; Young, "Reconsideration of Alexandrian Christology"; idem, "Christological Ideas"; idem, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, chapter 5. Cf. Brock, "Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox Conversations."

132. Nonetheless, the profundity of shared understanding holds true to this day, although its affirmation has been disallowed by schism. See, for example, Fouyas, *Theologikai kai Istorikai Meletai* 1, esp. 140–217; Every, "Monophysite Question"; Murray, "What does a Catholic Hope." Cf. Lebon, *Monophysisme Sévérien*, with Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*.

133. On the development of Monophysite theology, see Lebon, *Monophysisme Sévérien*; idem, "Christologie du monophysisme syrien"; R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*; and Darling, "Patriarchate of Severus." For the development of Chalcedonian theology, see esp. Moeller, "Chalcédonisme et le néo-chalcédonisme"; Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*; and P. T. R. Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*.

134. Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, 48–73, 154–64; Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 828–68.

135. See Charanis, *Church and State*; and, in general, Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, and Wigram, *Separation of the Monophysites*.

136. Evagrius, *HE* 3.44; pseudo-Dionysius, *Incerti auctoris chronicon*, 6–7 (John of Ephesus); John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 9.9.

137. For example, John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 90.20–26. See below, chapter 3.

138. Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, is essential for this whole period, as is Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique*. On Justinian's reign in general see, for example, Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* 2; Browning, *Justinian and Theodora*; and Stein, *Histoire du bas-empire* 2.

139. See esp. Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites*; also Frend, *Rise of*

the Monophysite Movement; and Wigram, *Separation of the Monophysites*. The tumultuous atmosphere is well caught in John of Nikiu's account of the Constantinopolitan riots, *Chronicle* 89.39–68; but the background is equally volatile. For example, Evagrius, *HE* 3.30–44; "Chronique melkite," ed. and trans. A. de Halleux, chaps. 13–14; and Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* 9.8–10. Severus of Antioch, *Sixth Book of Select Letters*, vividly portrays the sense of uncertainty and danger felt even at Severus' level of leadership. See also Darling, "Patriarchate of Severus."

140. Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, 4, 224, 363. Egypt's resources were well worth keeping within imperial reach. See Johnson and West, *Byzantine Egypt*, for the wealth of the church esp. 66–72, 252–54; and Wipszycka, *Ressources et activités économiques*.

141. Hardy, *Christian Egypt; Jews and Christians in Egypt*, ed. and trans. H. I. Bell; Frend, "Popular Religion"; Gregory, *Vox Populi*, esp. 129–61, 163–201.

142. For example, Severus of Antioch, *Sixth Book of Select Letters*, 1.49–50, 53, 5.11, 5.15.

143. *Vita Severi* (Zachariah Rhetor), ed. and trans. M.-A. Kugener; *Vita Severi* (John of Beith-Aphthonia), ed. and trans. M.-A. Kugener; Severus of Antioch, *Sixth Book of Select Letters* 1.49–50. Cf. Hardy, *Christian Egypt*, 111–32.

144. Severus of Antioch, *Sixth Book of Select Letters* 5.11. That Egypt lived up to this guiding role is clear from John of Ephesus' *HE*; see *Fragmenta*, ed. E. W. Brooks, 3.7–8. Cf. Hardy, *Christian Egypt*, 120–43.

145. The consequences of the Plague have until recently rarely been acknowledged. We have three contemporary sources of information: Procopius, *Wars* 2.22–23; Evagrius, *HE* 4.29; and John of Ephesus, *HE*, in pseudo-Dionysius, *Incerti auctoris chronicon*, 79–89, 94–110, 112, 119. See chapter 3 below for discussion of these and recent scholarship.

146. Chapter 3 attempts to make clear the actual conditions of the eastern provinces at this time. The material discussed there complements, at least to some extent, the vicious denunciation of Justinian's treatment of the eastern provinces that Procopius gives in the *Anecdota*. Browning, *Justinian and Theodora*, 60–61, discusses examples of Justinian's occasional imperial munificence, especially in cases of disaster. Cf. Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, 344–88.

147. See esp. Vasiliev, *Justin the First*; and Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique*, 74–112.

148. Justinian and his contemporary historians are discussed in chapter 4. See esp. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*.

I. "These Holy Images": John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints

1. A. Djakonov, *Ioann Efesskiy* (Petrograd, 1908), provided the most important breakthrough in postulating a biographical framework. The two best summaries, both dependent on Djakonov's work, are E. W. Brooks' Introduction

Marian Witness." John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 20, speaks also of the potency of Saint Thecla as intercessor.

VII. *John of Ephesus: Asceticism and Society*

1. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vitae*, in *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz. See also Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* 3:1–3, *Les moines de Palestine*. Cyril's biographies record the lives of Saints Euthymius, Sabas, John the Hesychast, Cyriacus, Theodosius, Theognius, and Abraamius. On Cyril as a hagiographer, see, above all, Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*.

2. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, PG 87.3.2851–3112.

3. *Vita Euthymii* 6; *Vita Sabae*, Prologue.

4. Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* 3.1:10, praises him for "une candeur charmante"; Cyril does, of course, use familiar hagiographical themes—for example, friendship with lions, divine protection, and temptation by Satan in the wilderness—that might be called "thematic stylization." But the presence of these incidents in no way undermines the historical integrity of his biographical narrative.

5. *Vita Euthymii* 41–60; *Vita Sabae* 77–90.

6. Cf., for example, *Vita Euthymii* 36, 40, 43; *Vita Sabae* Prologue, 6, 10, 15, 19, 27, 68, 77; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 5, 11; *Vita Kyriaki* 8, 10. For example, Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* 3.1:42–44; *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 2.2, cols. 2687–90 (I. Hauscherr). On Cyril's use of dates, see, above all, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, 340–55.

7. For example, *Vita Euthymii* 2, 16; *Vita Sabae* 1, 2, 9, 25; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 1, 3; *Vita Abraami*. Cf. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, 89–90; and cf., for example, the parallel situations of the Cappadocian Fathers, especially Basil's network of contacts; and the situation in fifth-century Egypt. On Basil, see in particular *Saint Basile, Lettres*; and the discussions in Kopecek, "Social Class"; Ramsey, "Life in the Days of St. Basil the Great," in *Pauline and Other Studies*, 369–406; idem, "Noble Anatolian Family"; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*. On the Egyptian situation, consider the connections laid out especially by Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*; cf. Rousseau, "Blood-relationships." The *Vita Antonii*, and Theodoret in his *Historia religiosa*, both struggle to justify the presence of uneducated, lower-class ascetic leaders.

8. For the political context, see F. T. Noonan, "Political Thought in Greek Palestinian Hagiography (ca. 526–ca. 630)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1975).

9. *Vita Euthymii* 17, 25, 38, 44; *Vita Sabae* 11, 17, 58, 64, 66, 67; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 12; *Vita Kyriaki* 8, 9, 17; Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, 126, 181–82.

10. *Vita Euthymii* 13; *Vita Sabae* 5, 14, 23, 34, 49; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 13, 18; *Vita Kyriaki* 10, 16.

11. *Vita Sabae* 25; *Vita Kyriaki* 18, 19.

12. For example, *Vita Euthymii* 25; *Vita Sabae* 67; *Vita Abraami*.
13. For example, *Vita Euthymii* 10, 12, 19, 23; *Vita Sabae* 39, 45; *Vita Kyriaki* 9, 10; *Vita Abraami*.
14. *Vita Euthymii* 30, 35; *Vita Sabae* 31, 72, 73; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 5; *Vita Theodosii* 3; *Vita Abraami*. This setup is closely aligned with Basil's welfare and social service program as instituted in Caesarea. Cf. Basil, *Lettres* 94, 142–54; and Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 43.63. This became the model for Byzantine *philanthropia*; see Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare*; Boojamra, "Christian Philanthropia"; and Downey, "Philanthropia."
15. *Vita Euthymii* 41, 43, 44, 48–60; *Vita Sabae* 78–84.
16. *Vita Euthymii* 17, 25; *Vita Sabae* 58, 64, 65, 67; Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, 123–25.
17. For example, *Vita Sabae* 44.
18. For example, the treatment in Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*.
19. *Vita Euthymii* 30, 35. There is a familiar motif here of spurning a woman's audience, however virtuous or pious she may be; the summary model is that of Arsenius, in the *Apophthegmata patrum*, PG 65.95–98. See also Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* 1, *Culture ou Sainteté*, 47–48.
20. *Vita Euthymii* 43.
21. *Vita Sabae* 50–54.
22. *Ibid.*, 55.
23. *Ibid.*, 56–57. Cf. Evagrius, *HE* 3.31, 33.
24. *Vita Sabae* 64, 66–67, 70. Cf. Procopius, *Anecdota* 11.24–26.
25. *Vita Sabae* 71–75. Sabas treats Theodora rather more kindly than Euthymius treated Eudocia, even while holding her Monophysitism in utter disdain.
26. *Vita Euthymii* 2, 20, 26–27.
27. *Vita Euthymii* 30; *Vita Sabae* 38, 52, 55, 74; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 27.
28. *Vita Euthymii* 27, 30, 43, 45; *Vita Sabae* 30, 33, 35–36, 38, 50, 56–57, 60, 72, 74, 83–90; *Vita Kyriaki* 11–15; *Vita Theodosii* 1; *Vita Theognii*. Cyril's condemnation of Leontius of Byzantium is scathing. The contrast to the opinion of modern scholars is noteworthy. Cf. Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, 90–103; Wigram, *Separation of the Monophysites*, 120; Moeller, "Chalcédonisme et le néo-chalcédonisme"; Sellers, *Council of Chalcedon*.
29. Cyril does mention an anchoress in the desert: *Vita Kyriaki* 18–19. There may not have been convents within the specific geographical area Cyril writes about outside Jerusalem, but the convents in and around the Holy City were certainly renowned. Consider those founded by Jerome and Paula, and Rufinus and Melania. There were also desert communities of women south of Cyril's region, in lower Palestine. Cf., for example, C. J. Kraemer, Jr., ed., *Excavations at Nessana* 3, *Non-Literary Papyri* (Princeton, 1958), P. Nessana 25 (?), 29, 31, 62, 79; and the Piacenza Pilgrim, *Travels* 12, 16, 22, 34; which mention communities throughout the Holy Land. I am indebted to Peter Donovan for these references.
30. *Vita Euthymii* 16, 31; *Vita Sabae* 7, 29, 69; *Vita Kyriaki* 4. Compare the similar attitude in Egypt, Chitty, *Desert a City*, 66–67.

31. *Vita Sabae*, 47. Women were not allowed to enter the monasteries even when in need: *Vita Euthymii* 54.

32. *Vita Euthymii* 1, 3, 23, 30, 35, 52, 54; *Vita Sabae* 53, 62–63, 68, 70–71, 80; *Vita Kyriaki* 18–19; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 23–24.

33. *Vita Euthymii* 1, 3; *Vita Sabae* 75; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 20, 23–24; *Vita Theodosii* 1; *Vita Theognii*.

34. *Vita Sabae* 62–63. Cf. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, 180–81.

35. Cf. Baynes, "The *Pratum Spirituale*," in *Byzantine Studies*, 261–70; Chadwick, "John Moschus"; and "Jean Moschus," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 8, cols. 632–40 (E. Mani).

36. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 179.

37. *Ibid.*, 84, 87, 89, 120–21, 170, 179. Cf. Cyril, *Vita Sabae* 24; *Vita Kyriaki* 18–19.

38. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 14, 19, 39, 45, 97, 135.

39. *Ibid.*, 136, 186, 207.

40. *Ibid.*, 186, 193, 201, 207.

41. *Ibid.*, 131–32.

42. *Ibid.*, 20–21, 99. Cf. Cyril, *Vita Sabae* 14; *Vita Kyriaki* 16; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 13.

43. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 38; cf. Cyril, *Vita Euthymii* 17.

44. See chap. 6.

45. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 26.

46. *Ibid.*, 30.

47. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

48. *Ibid.*, 106.

49. *Ibid.*, 29, cf. 36.

50. Another shared motif is the relationship between holy men and wild beasts, particularly lions. For example, Cyril, *Vita Euthymii* 13; *Vita Sabae* 23, 33–34, 49; *Vita Iohannis Hesychasti* 13; *Vita Kyriaki* 49–50; and John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 2, 18, 58. For a measure of realism beyond the motif, compare these with the nuns' lion in the Piacenza Pilgrim, *Travels* 34. In general, see Festugière, "Lieux communs"; and idem, *Moines d'Orient* 1:53–57. Cf., for example, Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 6.

51. Archaeological evidence appears to indicate that the sixth century witnessed an expansionist period in Palestine, despite the plague and other factors. For example, H. D. Colt, ed., *Excavations at Nessana* 1 (London, 1962), and C. J. Kraemer Jr., ed., *Excavations at Nessana* 3, *Non-Literary Papyri* (Princeton, 1958); and Cameron, "Late Antiquity." But cf. Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique*, 74–92, on Palestine's share of catastrophes, particularly of famine. Six earthquakes only are recorded for Palestine in the sixth century, of which two, in 502 and 531, were serious. Cf. Kallner-Amiran, "Revised Earthquake-Catalogue," 1–2. For a particular case in point see Downey, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century*.

52. Cyril, *Vita Sabae* 72–74; Cf. Procopius, *Anecdota* 11.24–29. See Avi-Yonah, *Jews of Palestine*, 241–43.

53. John of Ephesus, *Lives*, 21, PO 17:287–88.

54. *Ibid.*, 289.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, 291–92.

57. *Ibid.*, 12, PO 17:180–81.

58. *Ibid.*, 38, PO 18:643–45. On this episode see Harvey, “Physicians and Ascetics.” What makes this episode so striking is the contrast to how other hagiographers portray illness and healing. Cf., for example, Adnès and Canivet, “Guérisons miraculeuses.” Furthermore, John is prepared to call on “secular” doctors. Cf. Constantelos, “Physician-priests.”

59. Cf. Hopkins, “Contraception in the Roman Empire”; Patlagean, “Sur la limitation”; and Sigerist, *Civilization and Disease* (New York, 1944), esp. 69–71.

60. *Lives*, 6, PO 17:118.

61. *Ibid.*, 25, PO 18:614–18.

62. *Ibid.*, 615.

63. *Ibid.*, 616.

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